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**A Critical Analysis of the Linguistic and Educational
Challenges facing Border-Straddling Speech Communities,
with Special Reference to the Nyanja-Chewa-Mang'anja
Cluster of Southeastern Africa**

**by
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requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Education**

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Declaration: This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

The dissertation argues for the adoption of a new socio-linguistic concept, the “Border-Straddling Speech Community” in place of the more commonly used ‘cross-border’ or ‘trans-border languages’. The concept is to be understood to refer to socially-defined speech communities divided by political borders, and implicitly in Africa almost always applies to perceived ‘minority’ languages. Such African languages are partially invisible, disguised or hidden by the arbitrary nature of the colonial borders of African states. The dissertation examines some European and some African examples of border-straddling speech communities and identifies some of their typical characteristics. The fractured Nyanja-Chewa-Mang’anja speech community of Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique is examined in detail, in terms of its history and its present educational potential. The language is also spoken in Tanzania and Zimbabwe. In this case, the total number of speakers, although spread across five countries, would justify the wider use of the language in education if meaningful inter-state co-operation could be achieved. Finally the dissertation discusses the possible application in Africa of an educational policy favouring mother tongue education across state borders. The importance of mother tongue education has been recognised for over a decade, but little has been achieved in terms of implementation. Such a policy would require effective status planning as well as corpus planning. The dissertation refers to such framework discussions as those developed in 1996 between South Africa, Namibia and Botswana as possible models.

Keywords: Border-straddling speech communities; Cross-border languages; Trans-border languages; Nyanja language; Chewa language; Mother tongue education — Africa; Language planning — Africa; Publishing — African languages.

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Dedication

**To the memory of my late mother
Sawiche Binti Abdullah Nkhoma,
whose story has never been told**

Abbreviations and Acronyms

BSSC	Border straddling speech community
FRELIMO	Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Mozambique Liberation Front)
INDE	Instituto Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação (National Institute for Educational Development)
ITLC	Inter-Territorial Language Committee
MTE	Mother tongue education
NELIMO	Núcleo de Estudo de Línguas Moçambicanas (Nucleus for the Study of Mozambican Languages)
NCM	Nyanja-Chewa-Mang'anja cluster
PEBIMO	Projecto de Escolarização Bilingue em Moçambique (Project for Bilingual Teaching in Mozambique)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

Chapter 1

The Statement of the Problem

The Core Question

This dissertation is centred on an attempt to discover to what extent it is possible to *reconstitute* the fractured Nyanja-Chewa-Mang'anja (hereafter NCM) speech community in terms of the educational needs of fragmented language groups. This language cluster can be described theoretically as a 'border-straddling speech community', a concept that is first examined and theorised in various European and African political contexts. Finally the dissertation discusses the possible application of a hypothetical inter-state educational policy, using such framework discussions as those developed in 1996 between South Africa, Namibia and Botswana as a possible model.¹

As the author was born in Tanzania and is a mother tongue speaker of Nyanja, she draws on personal experience in support of some of the arguments in the dissertation. This also explains her special interest in this particular problem.

Border Straddling Speech Communities: Clarifying the Concept

The concept of the '*Border Straddling Speech Community*' (hereafter BSSC) is usually understood to refer to speech communities that are divided by political borders. However, *implicit* in the concept are certain other characteristics. The most important of these is that BSSC languages are almost always minority languages on at least one side of the common border. Sometimes the same language is known by different names on different sides of the border. In other cases the language is, often for politi-

¹ The recommendations of the Regional Workshop on Cross-Border Languages held in Okahandja, Namibia, on 23-27 September 1996, discuss possible measures for Kwanyama, Lozi and Tswana. At this workshop specific policy recommendations were devised on ways in which the three countries might work together in developing the languages that they share. (Legère 1998: 230-231). A similar workshop in Malawi four years later discussed Nyanja, Yao and other languages, and also drew up recommendations (Pfaffe 2001: 160-161).

cal reasons, virtually invisible.² The focal speech community of this dissertation—Nyanja-Chewa-Mang'anja—is just such a community. The speech community straddles the borders between four countries—Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, and Tanzania—and is spoken by a diaspora in Zimbabwe.

There is a small but growing body of literature devoted to the phenomenon of the BSSC both in Africa and Europe. Kamwangamalu (1997), for example, discusses the Bemba cluster that is found along the border between Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) border, and is known by different names there. In describing the extent of the area 'lying three to seven degrees south of the equator and extending about 400 km. between the Atlantic coast of Central Africa and Kinshasa' where the Kongo language is spoken, MacGaffey (1997: 46) points out that the language straddles the border between Angola, the DRC and Congo, but is not dominant in any of them.

The phenomenon of the BSSC is a universal one, but I will limit my examples essentially to three in Europe and three in Africa. For instance, Ryckeboer writes of the impact of political borders on language in the north of France, where at one time Dutch was spoken that

'... in the last three centuries, since the annexation of French Flanders to France in the last second half of the seventeenth century, the linguistic situation of the hinterland of Dunkirk has gradually changed from completely Dutch (Flemish) to almost completely French. Especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the state borders between France and Belgium have had a growing sociological impact on language use and on the characteristics of the original Flemish dialect on either side of the border' (2000: 79)

Sarhimaa (2000) has discussed the decline in status of the relatively little-known Karelian language, which straddles the Russo-Finnish border. As a result of partition in the 1920s, Ireland and England share an artificial common border that has helped to create a patchwork straddling of Irish and English speech communities, each influencing the other probably to the detriment of Irish, as Kallen has described (2000: 27).

² Spanish in South America, although it 'straddles' the border between Colombia and Venezuela, for example, is not a BSSC because it is fully present in both countries and is a majority language. It is neither invisible nor hidden. The term itself may need modification to make these characteristics explicit,

I want to argue, therefore, from my own personal experience as well as from the evidence in the case study that I shall present in this dissertation, that the fundamental defining characteristic of the BSSC is its *quality of invisibility or near invisibility*, of being *disguised*, of *being unrecognised*. This quality has serious implications for education policy, which I will explore at the end of the dissertation.

This hidden-ness is manifested in different ways, and in different degrees of intensity. Even in South Africa, such language communities as Tswana, Sotho, Swazi and Shangaan are 'hidden' both because of their low status in the media and in education, and because there is so little recognition of the fact that speakers of these and closely related languages are also scattered across Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Mozambique and even Zambia.

Most obviously and most commonly, BSSCs are partially invisible because their language is a minority tongue on one or both sides of the common political border (Dutch-speakers in France, or German-speakers in Belgium, Karelian-speakers in both Finland and Russia). In some other cases, in Africa and elsewhere, the existence of a BSSC is hidden because the language spoken on different sides of a border goes by different names. Kamwangamalu (1997:88) points out that although the component languages of the Bemba cluster (Lamba, Lima, Lala, Swaka, and Bemba) are *officially* treated as separate languages, in reality they are varieties of the same 'mother' language, namely Bemba. Galego (Galician) was sometimes considered a Spanish dialect despite being completely mutually comprehensible with Portuguese (Price 1998: 185-188). Similarly, the existence of the vast substratum of Occitan in southern France, as part of an Occitan-Gascon-Catalan continuum (Occitano-Romance), is disguised, and has been disguised ever since the religious wars of the 13th century (Price 1998: 343-348).

I shall argue that many African languages are partially invisible, disguised or hidden *even more* by the arbitrary nature of the colonial borders of African states, which cut through speech communities that existed before the colonial period as coherent social

and I return to this question later in the dissertation.

entities. One of the effects of this is that such languages are not seen in their entirety. In some cases—and the NCM cluster is just such a case—the total population of a given speech community may number as many as ten million speakers. However, part of the hidden character of the BSSC consists in the fact that each country only ‘counts’ those speakers of a given language who are found within its borders. As a result, majorities are transformed into minorities, and the sum of the parts is less than the whole.

In central Africa, the language cluster that I identify as the NCM cluster constitutes a BSSC whose members find themselves citizens of five different African states. Only in Malawi do mother tongue speakers of Chewa constitute a notional ‘majority’. In Zambia, primarily because the language is used as a *lingua franca* in Lusaka, Nyanja is recognised as an important language. But in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Tanzania, speakers of NCM cluster languages are hidden minorities. In Tanzania for example respondents of census are not asked what language they speak. As a result of that it is not easy to determine exactly how many speakers of Nyanja are found there. Since they are a small number, they are ignored thus becoming invisible or hidden (Swilla 2001). The aim of this study is to bring to the fore the BSSC phenomenon, using the NCM cluster to demonstrate how inherited or imposed political and geographical borders play a key role in presenting a distorted and *diminishing* picture of a given speech community. It is then easy for the idea that it is not worth the effort of using the language as a medium of instruction, or of developing and publishing educational material for such a speech community, to become the received wisdom.

As I have already argued, the concept of the border-straddling speech community requires closer definition. At the most superficial level, it can be argued that a BSSC is a speech community whose common language is spoken on both sides of a common international border between contiguous states. In some but not all cases, such a group of speakers of a language may historically have constituted a cultural and linguistic polity even if they spoke different but mutually intelligible dialects.

In southern Africa, and indeed throughout our continent, the existence of BSSCs is a common phenomenon. Beja (Bedawi) is spoken in Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia (Grimes 2000). Soninke is spoken in Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and

Gambia. (Elugbe 1998: 29-30). In the east, as Bamgbose (1991: 11) informs us, 'Swahili is spoken as a second language by different ethnic groups in Eastern and Central Africa just as Hausa is spoken by different ethnic groups in West Africa. One can then say that Kiswahili is spoken from northern Mozambique to southern Somalia, and from the Comores to the eastern Congo.' Languages of the Sotho cluster (Sotho, Pedi and Tswana) are spoken in Botswana, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia (Grimes 2000). The NCM cluster, the focal point of this study, is spoken in a heartland along the shores of Lake Nyasa (Lake Malawi) that includes southern Malawi, south-eastern Zambia, south-western Tanzania, and Tete Province in Mozambique, as well as in a diaspora that includes Zimbabwe and even South Africa.

Although many BSSCs exist because colonial borders cut through existing settled speech communities, it is necessary to recognise that new ones can and do constantly emerge, even for quite short periods, as the result of conflict and political instability in Africa. Ntondo explains this phenomenon in vivid terms as it affected the Kwanyama (Oshikwanyama) speakers of Namibia:

'A large number of Oshikwanyama speakers were displaced from their home area in the Kunene province by the South African invasion, and were forced to flee to Namibe and the south of Huila province, thus spreading their language as well. This forced displacement has contributed to extending the Oshikwanyama-speaking area so that this language is now found in three administrative regions of Angola.' (1998: 75)

We must also recognise that many, if not all speech communities do not constitute neatly discrete units that can be tidily mapped in two dimensions. In messy reality, in most geographic areas, there exists a matrix of other languages overlapping with the particular BSSC, and which may themselves be BSSCs as well, as Elugbe explains:

'Overlapping means a situation in which the territories or geographic areas of different linguistic units coincide. Overlapping can create as well as be created by discontinuousness, a state in which a given linguistic unit is found in two or more non-contiguous geographical areas.' (1998: 23)

Indeed, languages, especially uncoded languages, often constitute a fluid continuum, with various transitional varieties. Dolby calls this phenomenon the 'linguas-

phere' in an attempt to break up the concept of neatly codified and discrete language units (1999: 1).

BSSCs and Language Codification in Africa

Many African languages were codified and indeed named by missionaries or anthropologists after colonial borders were already in place. Harries has described the political rather than scientific criteria that resulted in Thonga-Shangaan and Ronga being names and described separately with their own grammars and orthographies despite their close similarities (Harries 1989: 86-87). In many cases, the colonial authorities and individuals started codifying local languages in their colonies without reference to or interest in another part of the same speech community that happened to lie across the border. One inevitable result was significant differences in orthography, as in the case of Sotho. The French-speaking missionaries Casalis and Arbousset of the Paris Evangelical Mission codified Sotho with French phonetic values in the mid-19th century. Their orthography is still used in Lesotho itself, but not in South Africa (Olivier n.d.). The South African orthography was established in 1957 (Dept. of Native Affairs 1957). As a result related languages can appear quite distinct on the printed page (Esterhuysen and Groenewald, 1999).

Prolonged separation also created conditions for the development of differentiated cultural, ethnic and national identities among formerly united communities now separated by an international border, in many senses an artificial division. For instance, Korea, Germany and Vietnam were all partitioned for political reasons during the Cold War period (Savada and Shaw, 1992; Cima, 1989). Though initially language communities in this situation are not differentiated, with the passing of time they begin to develop distinct identities. In Korea, for example, forty years of division 'has meant that there are also some divergences in the development of the Korean language north and south of the [demilitarised zone]' (Savada and Shaw, 1992). Some scholars have also argued that a so-called 'Ossie' (or eastern) cultural identity might be recognised as a reality among citizens of the now defunct German Democratic Republic (Krisch 1985; Silberman 1997). In East Germany, officials had 'encouraged the development of a standard language that [could] be distinguished from the standard German spoken in West Germany. [...] changes [were] apparent in the German lan-

guage as a result of the long separation of East Germany and West Germany. They are not as far reaching or as deeply implanted, however, as most Western scholars originally thought' (Burant 1988).

In cases where a BSSC speak a minority language on one or both sides of the frontier, membership brings to the fore issues of linguistic versus national identity. Are the Dutch speakers of northeastern France Dutchmen with French citizenship, or Frenchmen who happen to speak Dutch? Are the Karelian-speakers Finnish or Russian, or neither? Am I a Malawian with a Tanzanian passport, or a Nyanja-speaking Tanzanian like any other?

The Berlin conference of the colonial powers in Africa was held in 1884 (Pakenham 1991). At this conference, the African continent was formally divided into colonies that became the 'property' of the various European powers, based on effective occupation. Henceforth, the African colonies began a process of assuming the linguistic identities of their colonisers. Tanganyika was part of Deutsch Ostafrika, but when Germany lost her colonies after the First World War, the territory was handed over to the British and English became the language of the colonial administration. Senegal, as a French colony, employed French while Mozambique and Angola adopted Portuguese as the language of the administration and assimilation.

Concepts of Territoriality in Africa

Underlying the concept of the BSSC is a tension between the political map of Africa—an essentially European or Western construction of an African reality—the African linguistic map, and the pre-colonial mental map of Africa. Nugent has argued that in the pre-colonial period of African history, political space was mapped mentally rather than cartographically (1996: 36).

Thus, the notion of the boundary was a permeable one, and was measured, for example, by the number of days it took to travel from one place to another. In the case of Greater Asante, in present-day Ghana, for example, the boundaries were measured as a notional forty days travel from the centre in all directions. In Greater Asante royal officials were placed along the greater roads and in the leading towns of the empire.

This clearly implied an underlying conception of where the sovereignty of Asante started and ended (Nugent 1996).

In the Sokoto Caliphate, in what is now northern Nigeria, the frontier was demarcated through the establishment of *ribats* or walled towns. In southeastern Nigeria, frontiers would have been represented by a loose demarcation of those villages with which the centre traded. Thus, the market cycle itself must have created its own sense of spatial territoriality (Nugent 1996).

BSSCs, Education and Language

The widespread nature of the phenomenon of the BSSC in Africa has complex and serious ramifications for education policy at primary, secondary and even tertiary levels. Issues that need to be addressed include the question of mother tongue education and how far up the system it continues, related cognitive questions, and even the sociolinguistic problem of the relationship between language and social identity. At the most practical level, there is the issue of codification already referred to.

The significant total number of speakers of some BSSCs—in the millions—justifies their being taken into consideration for the purposes of education policy. We are told that meaningful learning takes place in a situation where learners are taught in the language that they understand best. Prah informs us that

‘Mother tongue is the primary code for the perception of reality. Second and third languages, construct their intellectual edifice from the perceptual foundation established by the mother tongue. In the language learning process, before a second language is sufficiently internalized to grow as an autonomous system, the primary or mother tongue serves as a reference point for categorizing and arranging thought and linguistic patterns for the second (weaker) language’. (1995: 45)

At the anecdotal level, my own experience of formal education supports Prah’s arguments. I was educated in Tanzania, where the language of instruction from standard one to seven is Swahili. In my time English was taught as a subject from standard three onwards. On entering secondary school, English became the language of instruction and Swahili was taught as a subject, while remaining the language of instruction

only for *Siasa* (Politics or Civics) and Swahili literature. The learning experience in secondary school was less enjoyable than in primary school for me. It was only a few years ago that I was able to pinpoint the reason for this—my comparatively inadequate grasp of English. In primary school I had no problems with understanding and engaging with what I was learning. In secondary school I can confidently say there was no adequate linguistic foundation to equip me to learn through the medium of English.

In colonial times the education agenda was aimed at educating a few Africans who could serve the needs of the colonial powers for low-level administrative and other staff. This policy may have worked well for that purpose, but it does not help the contemporary African child, undergoing formal school education in a foreign language that she has inadequately mastered. Independent African states cannot develop with the majority of the school-age population struggling to find meaning in education. For countries to move forward, education has to meet the needs of learners, one of which is the use of an appropriate language of instruction. Unfortunately education policy makers in independent African states have historically preferred the *visible* colonial languages to the *hidden* local languages—often hidden as BSSCs—for instruction purposes.

Chapter 2

Towards a Typology of the BSSC: Some Partially and Fully Codified European Languages

Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is to extend the brief discussion of the theoretical character of the concept of the ‘border-straddling speech community’ from chapter one, and then to locate it, first of all, in the *European* political context. In order to do this, I shall examine some examples of partially and fully codified European languages that nonetheless *seem* to constitute examples of BSSCs. Using the examples discussed, I also begin to construct a non-exhaustive broad typology of border-straddling speech communities, for subsequent application to African case studies that are described in the third—and in the case of the NCM cluster, especially the fourth—chapters of the dissertation.

It is now widely recognised that the existence of BSSCs is a universal phenomenon. Although the concept has been quite widely discussed in the recent African literature on the subject, most writers have preferred different and simpler terminology, e.g. ‘cross-border languages’ (Legère, 1998: *passim*; Pfaffe 2001: *passim*) or ‘transborder languages’ (Chumbow 1999: 51-69). Although the terminology used here might be criticised for being overly clumsy and even for being indicative rather than scientific, there are good reasons for preferring it. First of all, the emphasis on the ‘speech community’ sharpens the sociolinguistic as opposed to the merely linguistic aspect; second, the expression ‘border-straddling’ brings out the primacy of the speech community, which was, after all, there before the border was drawn in the majority of cases. The obvious, essential and defining characteristic of the BSSC phenomenon is that a common language is spoken on both sides of a political frontier. The border cuts or slices (note the violence of the terminology) through a speech community, dividing people who share features of a common culture into different nations, even though their language continues to exist as a fluid contin-

uum. However, as I began to argue in the first chapter, such a definition is only a starting point.

The BSSC might be reductively defined as simply a speech community whose language is spoken in at least two or more states in a specific geographic area, possibly also overlapping or intermingled with other languages. Chumbow, for example, interprets trans-border languages as simply 'languages whose domain of usage geographically *straddles* international boundaries' (1999: 51, emphasis added). But BSSCs seem frequently to occur in cases where the language spoken on both sides of the political frontier is *a minority language*, that is to say to some degree *a hidden language*. Membership of such a speech community immediately brings to the fore—for the individual and the group—issues of regional versus national identity, besides the problems of technical, orthographic and grammatical normalisation between varieties, of cross-national cooperation in education, and so on.

The division of speech communities by political borders is a universal problem that has affected many people around the world, as I shall show in this and subsequent chapters. Typically, for *any given area*, the linguistic map and the political map are not synchronous. A political map will show national borders, without making any allowance for the much more complex overlapping matrix of socio-geographic space occupied in physical reality by the speech communities found in the area. Even in a schematic map, in which each speech community is a discrete unit, the spatial reality is more complex than that delineated by political boundaries.

The Elusive Idea of the 'Speech Community'

The concept of the 'border straddling speech community' is, self evidently, subordinate to the broad concept of the speech community, and thence to the even broader sociological notion of the group. The expression 'speech community' has been extensively but inconclusively discussed in the literature of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology over the years (Wardhaugh 1998: 116-129; Duranti 1997: 72-83). The expression has, in Patrick's words 'been one of the key concepts in sociolinguistics since its beginning, and

yet at the same time remains one of the least satisfactory' (1998: 1). Despite this, it seems to be agreed that 'it is possible to use the concept [...] without much difficulty' in the face of widespread disagreement among scholars as to how it should be or might be defined (Wardhaugh 1998: 116). In fact, the term is so fundamental to these disciplines that it is 'on a par with other basic notions such as 'language', 'dialect' or 'grammar' as a primary object of description and theorising' (Patrick 1998). For that reason, it is useful briefly to look at the idea more closely before moving on to the specific case studies, in order to identify some of the ambiguities.

Some scholars derive the term 'speech community' from German sociological terms such as *Sprechbund* (speech union), *Sprachbund* (language union) or *Sprachgemeinschaft* (language community) (Patrick 1998; Wardhaugh 1998: 116). The expression was first used in English by Bloomfield over 65 years ago, and has remained in general use ever since (1935: 29). But the notion depends in its turn on some kind of satisfactory definition of the 'community' or 'group' within society. Sociologists, however, use these terms in as many different ways as ordinary citizens do. The term 'community' is often loosely used in popular discourse to mean little more than a neighbourhood, or even a population with a single common characteristic (e.g. the 'white community', the 'black community' or the 'gay community').¹ Sociologists, broadly speaking, tend to see groups either as 'independent isolable units of social structure' (the weak concept of structure) or as 'relevant only in relation to units of like size that for immediate purposes are contrasted with [them]' (the strong concept) (Brown and Levinson 1979: 298-299 quoted by Wardhaugh 1998: 121). In the latter perspective, membership of a speech community is fluid—I am a member of the NCM speech community when I am speaking that language in a concrete social situation, but in other circumstances I can just as easily belong to or 'participate in' the Swahili or Portuguese speech communities, for example.² This flexible concept of

¹ Interestingly, the expression 'community language' used in contrast with 'heritage language' *can* be an indicator of the low social status of a language. In Canada, a community language is a language other than English and French, officially recognized as culturally important to a national minority, whether it is indigenous (such as Ojibwa or Inuktitut) or immigrant (such as Italian or Ukrainian) (McArthur 1992: 242).

² Hymes makes this distinction between membership and participation, which will be useful later when describing NCM mother tongue speakers and those who use Nyanja only as a lingua franca (in Lusaka for example) (Hymes 1974: 50-51 quoted by Wardhaugh 1998: 120-121).

speech community is advantageous, especially in multilingual contexts, because individuals are able to shift identities quite freely.

Speech communities may share a sense of a common cultural, social and historical identity as a result of shared speech. But it is a mistake to assume that the speech community is a 'given' that precedes, as it were, or underpins cultural identity. Indeed, some studies seem to show that speech communities can constitute themselves in circumstances of exile, for example, around shared *geographical* origins, despite linguistic differences (Zaheer 1998: abstract).

Contemporary scholarship seems to be moving away from the abstract or essentialist ideas of earlier analysts such as Chomsky, whose definition of a 'completely homogeneous speech community' was useful only at the most theoretical level (1965: 3). Lyons' definition ('all the people who use a given language (or dialect)') was not much better (1970: 326). Wardhaugh offers a definition 'some kind of social group whose speech characteristics are of interest and can be described in a coherent manner', which has the virtue of flexibility (1998: 116). Duranti probably takes this trend furthest, offering us 'the product of the communicative activities engaged in by a given group of people' to which he adds by way of comment that the definition 'takes the notion [...] to be a point of view of analysis rather than an already constituted object of inquiry' (1998: 82).

From all this, it should be evident that 'real' speech communities are complex and untidy entities that can and do constitute themselves, among other things, independently of the confines of the particular borders of the political state, whether post-colonial or not. Two-dimensional language maps in turn are likely to fail to reflect the total reality in the numbers of users and speakers, the geographical spread of given language, or the way in which languages are intermingled. It is the issue of dyssynchronicity between the linguistic map and the political map and its disruptive influence on language development generally and language education in particular that is under the spotlight in this study. The minority BSSC, because it straddles a border, offers a distorted or partial self image—an image in hiding—and this usually impacts negatively on efforts to have such minority

languages taken more seriously, developed or even used for educational purposes. Since minority languages are customarily viewed as relatively unimportant, or as being politically divisive, it is easy to argue that it would be too costly to promote them. But in this study, I shall try to show that there is an alternative way of looking at speech communities and especially BSSCs. When speech communities are viewed in their entirety, the number of speakers and users 'increases', the complex geographical spread becomes visible, and the idea of the 'minority' language starts to fall away. I shall return to these concepts and this vocabulary in the NCM case study in particular.

The European Case-Studies

In order to attempt to identify the common features, if any, of some 'real' cases, I shall now survey three different cases of fairly well described 'border-straddling speech communities' in Europe. These are first, the Karelian speech community along the Russo-Finnish frontier; second, Irish and English in the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland; and last, the Flemish spoken in the extreme north-eastern corner of France. Why choose these three widely divergent examples of BSSCs? Two of them are in (probably) terminal decline for different reasons, while the third is flourishing overall. They thus enable us to identify variables that may determine survival or growth as opposed to language decline or death. As we shall see, the future of Karelian hangs in the balance, as both Russian and Finnish, as state languages, overshadow it. Irish appears to be in terminal decline, despite being an official state language. Dutch, at least in the Netherlands and Belgium, with twenty million speakers and a thriving press, is healthy and fit.

National borders affect the lives of speech communities in multiple ways. Urciuoli stated the problem concisely when she wrote that 'when languages take on sharp edges, i.e. borders, they are mapped onto people and therefore onto ethnic nationality (which may or may not map onto a nation-state)' (1995: 533). Other scholars have also argued along similar lines with regard to other kinds of boundaries:

'The influence of socially constructed borders on the dialect landscape, especially those that reflect political, economic or ecclesiastic boundaries, is often assumed to be minor compared to the influence of natural borders [...] However, European state borders cutting across old dialect con-

tinua sometimes appear to have a significant impact on dialect change' (Hinskens, Kallen and Taeldeman 2000: 17).

In the cases presented here, we see affected people divided by shifting political frontiers and sometimes obliged to adopt majority languages for educational, social, political or even for all purposes. Some individuals and groups lose their original languages altogether, or begin to speak a variety of the original language diluted by contact with culturally dominant but sometimes unrelated majority languages. Major languages may be split up into several fragmented speech communities; new speech communities may develop artificially; separate orthographies may cause fragmentation; common literary traditions may fragment or fail to develop; and eventually, separate communities with their own identities may emerge.

Karelian in Decline: a History of War and Emigration

Karelian is a little-known member of the Finno-Ugrian language family, of which the better-known members are Finnish and Estonian. It is spoken on both sides of the southern stretch of the border between Finland and the Russian Federation, with other scattered communities of speakers located in Russia near Kalinin, and to the south (see the map on page 17 for an indication of the areas involved). Authorities differ on the details, but there seem to be four main varieties and the current total number of speakers is an estimated 60,000 or so (see below). The Karelians formed the largest national minority in the Soviet Union whose language was not a literary language in its own right (Anttikoski 1996). Confusingly, the term Karelian is also used in Finland to refer to an eastern *Finnish* dialect. There is very little in the way of an independent Karelian literature, although some books were published in the 1930s (Price 1998: 280-281; Grimes 2000).

Unfortunately for the Karelians, at least nine border wars were fought between Sweden, Finland and Russia in the six centuries or so between 1323 and 1944 and in each case, as three powerful nations attempted to gain control of their area, the Karelian speech communities found themselves further divided, with speakers either on the Russian or the Swedish-Finnish side of the changing border. One result of these continuous disturbances

was that ‘the [related] eastern Finnish Savo dialects and the dialects of Karelian that were spoken in the easternmost corner of Finland seem to have grown apart in many respects’ (Sarhima 2000: 165).

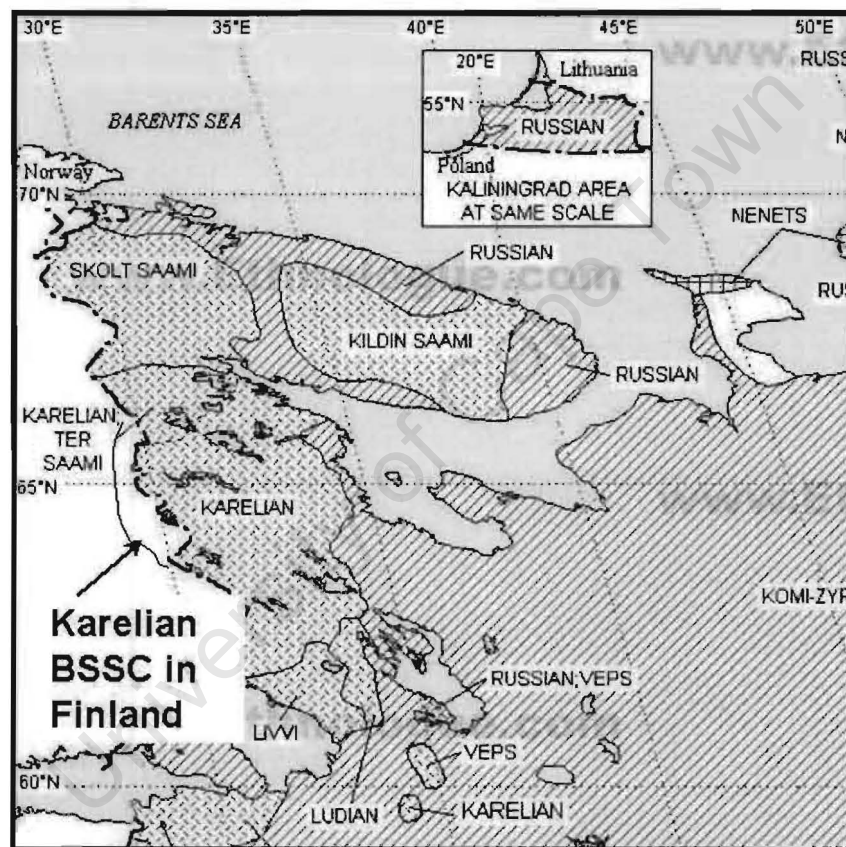
The Karelians were often overwhelmed by events over which they had little or no influence. The Great Northern War of 1700-1721 was fought between Sweden, then a declining regional super-power, and a semi-secret alliance of Russia, Poland-Saxony, and Denmark-Norway. At the Peace of Nystad in 1721 Sweden ceded large territories to Russia, including Livonia, Estonia, Ingria (where the new Russian capital of St. Petersburg was built) and Eastern Karelia. Russia emerged as the dominant power in the Baltic, taking possession of such resources as the iron ore deposits of Sweden’s former Baltic provinces (Rickard 2000). The historically Karelian area ceded to the Russians had been under Swedish rule for over four centuries. A new border sliced through Karelian-speaking villages and parishes, causing significant social, cultural and economic distress to the frontier population. Over the following decades, that part of the Karelian speech community that had fallen under Russian rule was subjected to a policy of ‘Russification’, resulting in an overall decline in the number of native Karelian speakers among the young and the middle-aged (Sarhima 2000: 167).

Forces variously composed of economic interest and political processes, rather than social or cultural logic, draw most political borders. In the case of the Karelians, they were caught up in a struggle between a declining power (Sweden) and an emerging one (Russia) to gain control of the Baltic and the mineral resources (iron ore deposits) that lay under their soil. The fate of the politically insignificant Karelian speech community, caught up in the military struggles between Sweden and Russia, was only secondary. Even the iron ore deposits in the area were more important.

Throughout most of the nineteenth century, Finland itself, a mere Grand Duchy, was part of the Russian Empire. In 1917, with the coming of the Russian Revolution, the Karelians faced another watershed in their history, as Finland won independence from Russia. As a result the border between Finland and Russia became a full political border between

states, where previously it had been informal and simply administrative. This change affected the Karelian people in several ways. The inhabitants of six major Karelian communities along the border became Soviet subjects. In addition, the new border represented a divide between two competing social systems and cultures, the Communist and the capitalist, a reality that over time created massive cultural differences between the divided communities.

Map: Karelian BSSC in the Russian Federation and Finland



Source: adapted from Grimes 2000.

The division had other effects too. Two distinct varieties began to emerge under the local influences of either Russian (an unrelated eastern Slavonic language, part of the Indo-European family) or Finnish (a close relative of Karelian in the Finno-Ugrian family). From Russian, Soviet Karelian began to adapt to an influx of new social and political terminology, borrowed from the vocabulary of Marxism-Leninism. To this day, and as a

direct result, a large number of Russian lexemes are found in the spontaneous speech of native Karelian speakers from the Russian Federation. The Karelian that is transmitted from parent to child is now sometimes considered an impure or 'broken' variety, in other words, characterised by an admixture of Karelian and Russian words.

Wars and border changes, *inter alia*, have accelerated an overall decline in the number of Karelian speakers, and in a fading of the genuine shape of Karelian in the minds of its native speakers. In the 1930s, about 160,000 people were speaking Karelian as a native language, but according to the 1989 Soviet census, only around half of ethnic Karelians can actually speak the language—perhaps 61,000 people. (Price 1998: 280). The linguistic and ethnic character of the frontier population has changed.

Economic opportunities were also lost. Karelians on the Russian side were deprived of traditional trading opportunities in Finland. Those on the Finnish side of the border lost additional earnings from work in Russian factories and sawmills. The local economy of the Karelians entered crisis mode, accelerating the disappearance of the traditional Karelian way of life in both Finland and Soviet Karelia. The crisis could be seen in three specific processes: cross-border migration; migration to industrial centres; and the mass immigration of non-Karelian populations into traditionally Karelian territories.

Karelians who found themselves in Finnish or Swedish territories were 'forced to attend Lutheran services and build numerous Lutheran churches' (Sarhima 2000: 165). So a BSSC may find not only that its language rights are interfered with, but also such fundamental aspects of social identity as religion and culture as well. But in the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the situation began to improve a little. '*Perestroika*' and '*glasnost*' created a freer atmosphere in which official support for national minority languages was even possible. In the Karelian Republic, now part of the Russian Federation, Karelian began to be taught in kindergarten along with Russian, even though Russian remains the language of instruction. A language law to grant Karelian official status has been discussed, but has been blocked by the ethnic Russian majority in the legislature. Finnish has also been suggested as a possible second official language (Anttikoski, n.d.).

This brief descriptive case study offers an example of how a border can affect a speech community. The falling number of Karelian speakers is at least partly the result of the wars between more powerful neighbouring nations—Russians on one side and Finns and Swedes on the other—that have split the Karelian speech community. Much of the population has emigrated, leaving behind traditional ways of life and language, and acquiring new lifestyles in new environments. Nevertheless, the changes that occurred in the 1990s have been important for the Karelian language's chances of survival. The recognition of minority languages in the Russian Federation has empowered surviving speakers, especially when minority languages are taught as subjects in schools.³

To summarise the most salient outcomes of the overview of this example:

- ❑ linguistic pressure is usually accompanied by pressures on *cultural* identity, including religious identity;
- ❑ loss of cultural identity can lead to the physical disaggregation of communities, e.g., by emigration;
- ❑ the economic and political interests of the powerful 'border-defining powers' *override the needs* of the mutilated speech community;
- ❑ political borders often help to create language varieties or dialects.

I shall return to some of these points when I come to examine the Nyanja case in chapter four, to draw parallels or to substantiate my argument.

Irish and Irish English: a Patchwork Linguistic Borderland

The second case study examines a situation that is similar in some ways to the first. But in this case we examine a speech community *that is not restricted to the use of one language*. Scholars such as Kroskrity, Woolard, the Hills, and others have established long

³ There is a Karelian Research Centre (Karel'skii Nauchnyi Tsentr) at the Russian Academy of Sciences, with a Website at <http://www.krc.karelia.ru/publ/index.en.html>).

since that bilingual and multilingual speech communities are quite normal phenomena (Duranti 1998: 76-79).

One of the two languages in question here—Irish—has been an official language of the Republic of Ireland for many years and has a long literary tradition (Price 1998: 243, 245). The Irish have been in linguistic contact with the English, their neighbours, and others for over 800 years in varying relationships and conditions, and Irish English, as the variety is called, derives from the arrival of English and Scottish settlers from the sixteenth century onwards (McArthur 1992: 530). Dialect differences, however, do not ‘correspond exactly with any county or other regional boundary in Ireland’ (McArthur 1992: 530). As another scholar puts it, ‘long before the establishment of today’s border in Ireland, the dominant dialectal division was already between the north with its continuing interaction with Gaelic-speaking Scotland, and the southern zone, where other influences were at work’ Given therefore that dialectal patterns for both English and Irish predate significantly the establishment of the political borders between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, the same writer goes on, ‘it is not surprising that the border does not determine the Ulster dialect boundary in either language’. (Kallen 2000: 33).

In what sense do speakers of Irish and Irish English constitute a border-straddling speech community? In order to answer this question it is necessary to understand how the present border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland came to be drawn.

In January 1919 Irish members of parliament abstained from the British parliament and instead convened a national assembly in Dublin, proclaiming national independence. Guerrilla fighting broke out in a sharp escalation of violence, leading up to an attack in early 1920 on a police barracks. Finally, in December 1920 the British parliament set up one parliament for the six northeastern counties of Ireland and another for the remaining 26 counties in the south. The Protestant majority in the north accepted this and elected a separate parliament in May 1921. The Roman Catholic minority in the north and most people in the south did not.

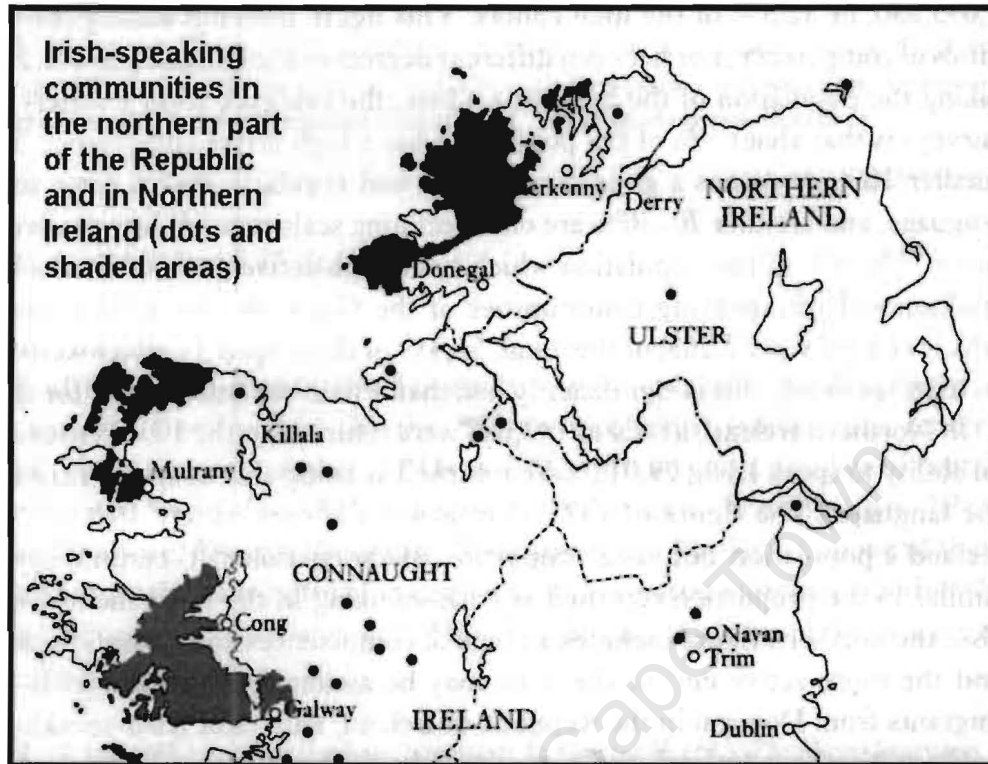
The first wave of fighting ended in a truce in July 1921, and a treaty was signed in December, under which the 26 counties became the Irish Free State, with a Boundary Commission to review territorial claims. Partition remained so controversial, however, that by June 1922, the Irish Civil War had begun. By August pro-Treaty forces, supported by the British, had taken control of all urban areas, and a protracted guerrilla campaign followed until April 1923. Since that date, the partition of Ireland has been a political reality.

Both the Irish Free State and its successor, the Republic of Ireland, have adopted a policy of trying to restore the Irish language and giving support to the *Gaeltacht* areas. Partly as a result of this policy, the Irish language is still spoken by an estimated three percent of the total population, although it is still very much under threat, with less than 20,000 native speakers (Fios Feasa 1999).

Irish belongs to the Goidelic branch of the Celtic language family. It has a long and distinguished literary tradition going back to the eighth century. According to the 1991 census, although perhaps a third of the population (just over one million people) claimed some competence in Irish, only five percent of Irish citizens have high active competence. This represents perhaps 80,000 people, most of them resident in the so-called *Gaeltacht* or officially Irish-speaking areas (see the map below, shaded areas). In Northern Ireland, about 140,000 claimed some level of competence (Price 1998: 248-250).

For most people in Ireland, the Irish language is a subject primarily learned in the classroom, and is not widely used in daily life. The decline of Irish throughout the country was noted in the nineteenth century, particularly in areas where English and Scottish population settlement had been successful. Kallen observes that the arrival of English and Scots settlers in much of Ulster did not eliminate the Irish language altogether, but rather established new language contact situations which resulted in Ulster acquiring distinctive language characteristics (2000:34). The decline accelerated after the establishment of English language schooling in 1831, and after the great potato famine of the 1840s, with its resulting mass emigrations.

Map of Irish-Speaking Communities



Source: adapted from Price 1998: p.249

In the Republic Irish is the subject of standardisation in schools, the media, and the government, but no comparable Irish language activities are available in Northern Ireland.

Again, to summarise the main points that emerge from the Irish case:

- ❑ a well developed literary tradition, such as the Irish one, is no guarantee of linguistic survival;
- ❑ support from and intervention by the state is no guarantee of linguistic survival;
- ❑ political nationalism cannot guarantee survival either;
- ❑ although it is not the only factor, a point is reached where the lack of critical mass (number of speakers), helps push a border-straddling speech community into terminal decline.

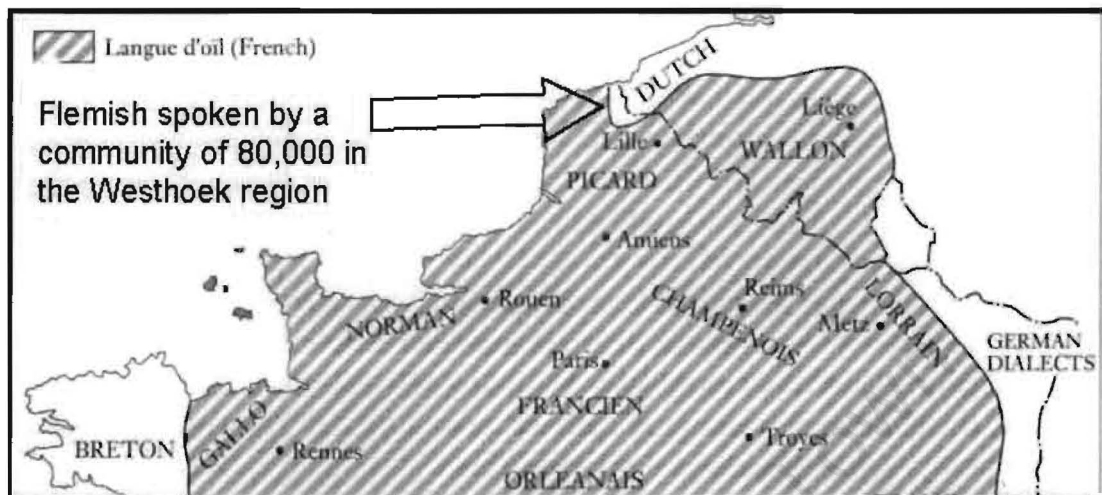
Flemish in France: Gradual Elimination of an Anomaly

The third case study examines a situation in which a political border has not followed or respected the social and cultural space of two neighbouring speech communities, in this case, the French and the Dutch. Neither of these languages, however, is in general terms under threat, hidden, invisible, or in any way disadvantaged. Nonetheless, the massive pressure of national linguistic standardisation has been at work from the beginning to bring those Dutch-speakers who find themselves French by nationality, into the French linguistic community. Ryckeboer (2000: 79) states: 'in the last three centuries, since the annexation of French Flanders to France in the second half of the seventeenth century, the linguistic situation of the hinterland of Dunkirk has gradually changed from completely Dutch (Flemish) to almost completely French'. The present language situation in the north of France is characterised by a glacial but steady movement of the linguistic border towards the political one, favouring Romance at the expense of Germanic. This is hardly surprising: a big population belonging to one language community will often absorb a minority language.

Modern Dutch (Nederlands) is a West Germanic language spoken by as many as twenty million people in the Netherlands, Belgium and France, as well as in former Dutch colonial possessions such as the Netherlands Antilles. It has a long and distinguished literary tradition that continues to thrive today. The variety of Dutch spoken in Belgium and northern France is only slightly different from the variety spoken in the Netherlands.

Ryckeboer (2000:79) tells us that the early presence of speakers of Germanic varieties in the third and fourth century was more decisive for the origin of the early language boundaries than the great Germanic invasion of the beginning of the fifth century. In the Pas-de-Calais there was intensive Saxon colonization from the fifth to the eighth century. Calais itself belonged to the English Crown from 1347 to 1558. There was a steady growth of Romance influence to the north of the original language boundary from the ninth century onwards. This can be seen as a kind of radiation or colonization by the Romance speaking population. (Ryckeboer: 2000: 83).

Map. Flemish in the Westhoek Area of Northern France



Source: Price 1998: 189.

Flemish was still the official language for lawsuits in Saint-Omer as late as 1593. French had replaced Latin as the official language for the town administration in the thirteenth century. The town had previously been completely Flemish, but later on became bilingual and then completely French. Thus a language shift took place in the Pas-de-Calais, influenced to some extent by commercial and cultural influences of the towns.

The Picard variety of French was used as the official language from the fourteenth century onwards (on Picard, see Price 1998: 356-357). Political events clearly influenced the language situation: during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were many upheavals. French, Dutch and Spanish troops ravaged the northern part of the Pas-de-Calais. Like the Karelian speech community, the Flemish-speaking farmers had no choice but to flee and take refuge in Flemish regions. Their former homes were taken over by the *Picardie*-speakers. Warfare again played a role in displacing a population group.

Language, however, is not just a means of communication. It also plays a key role in the formation of the individual's identity. As a result, wherever a person moves to, she moves

with her language. When movement occurs, especially involuntary movement like that triggered by war or civil unrest, three possible scenarios may occur:

- ❑ The group that moves to a new environment may find itself to be a minority. Such a group may well lose their language, since the newcomers will have to learn the language of the majority.
- ❑ The itinerant group may outnumber the local inhabitants. The newcomer's language may then, over time, take root as the language of that area. In this case the local minority language may end up being swallowed by the language of the newcomers.
- ❑ The migrating language group may be roughly in proportion to the host speech community. The two language groups will coexist with one another.

I shall return to these noteworthy points in chapter four, when I address the Nyanja case study.

It is also important to remember how Dutch and French were positioned as functional languages in this area. French was introduced in the thirteenth century to replace Latin as the official language. Dutch on the other hand continued to be the main medium of education. From the thirteenth century onwards, French was the language of the courts and the nobility in the Flanders. It had great prestige in the upper classes, although it did not threaten or endanger the vernacular tongue. Dutch, or Flemish, was the spoken language, the language of local administration and literature in the so-called Flamingant Flanders, the country to the north of the linguistic border.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, most intellectuals and men of letters were bilingual in large parts of this region, and were well versed in the culture and literature of the French and Dutch worlds. Bilingualism developed because both languages held space in which to co-exist, each with its own specific function. In Saint-Omer, however, Dutch or Flemish remained the official language for lawsuits only until 1593. French was then given official status and became the language of town administration, replacing Latin.

French schools were established for the children of the Francophone members of the administration and the army. This step shifted the balance and played an important role in what proved to be the irreversible rise to dominance of French. By the nineteenth century, the towns and their rural environs had become predominantly Francophone, with the Picardie variety the dominant influence. The elevation of French to the status of the official language of the town administration led to a gradual change among the population, over a number of years, from Flemish to French.

The French Revolution of 1789 dealt another blow to the survival of Dutch in this region. Although Dutch continued to fulfil the function of a cultural language, after the Revolution minority languages—even French dialects—were condemned as remnants of the old feudal society, and they had to be eradicated as soon as possible. Educational legislation banned the use of such languages in all levels of the education system. As a result Dutch gradually lost most of its functions as a cultural language. As Ryckeboer argues, ‘the establishment of Picardi French in Pas-de-Calais may have hastened the language change and even the Picardi dialect in the countryside between Bourbourg and Gravelines’ (2000: 85).

Are These Cases Studies of *Genuine* BSSCs?

Having examined these three cases, the question naturally arises, are they genuine examples of BSSCs, and if so, can they be used to begin to develop a typology of the phenomenon? In the absence of a useful agreed definition among scholars as to what constitutes a speech community, let alone a BSSC, any answer to the question is inevitably provisional, but may be attempted nevertheless.

We may safely leave Russian, English and French (the dominant languages in each of our case studies) aside. Both Irish and Flemish are fully codified European languages with long literary traditions, and both are recognised state languages. Despite their relative invisibility in, respectively, Northern Ireland and northeastern France, neither is likely to disappear as a result of official neglect—although both may disappear in the border areas described for other reasons. Flemish as a Dutch dialect is flourishing in Belgium, with

some six million speakers (Price 1998: 134) and so its fate in France is not determinant. Irish, although threatened, is a symbol of Irish national pride and is supported by the state. It is hard, therefore, to see these two cases as strictly analogous to the low status and semi-invisible languages of Africa that we shall be examining in the following chapters.

Karelian, on the other hand, does seem to fit the bill. It has endured official neglect in two or three countries (Sweden, Finland and Russia) for several hundred years, it is numerically in decline, it is only partially codified and has an extremely weak literary tradition. Less than half of the people who would identify themselves as ethnic 'Karelians' are actually able to speak it.

The European case studies also serve to give us some idea of the power relationships and other factors that play a critical role in the fate of border-straddling speech communities. These include the motivation for the language policy (or absence of language policy) of the dominant language groups. For example, as we have already seen:

- ❑ linguistic threats are also threats to *cultural* identity;
- ❑ linguistic threats can lead to physical dispersion;
- ❑ economic interests usually drive linguistic processes;
- ❑ political borders create languages and dialects;
- ❑ codification, a literary tradition, and nationalism are necessary but insufficient conditions for a BSSC's survival;
- ❑ there is a critical mass required for sustained growth or even survival of BSSCs;
- ❑ a minority BSSC is already in trouble;
- ❑ in-migration by dominant-language speakers is a threat.

Let us now apply some of these insights to African situations.

Chapter 3

The Case for African Exceptionalism: Colonial Borders and African Ethnicity

Introduction: Border Studies in Africa

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the case that is often made, either implicitly or explicitly, for an African exceptionalism with regard to the way border-straddling speech communities have emerged on our continent, and the way in which their social and cultural development is affected by their present situation. The assumption of exceptionalism comes at least partly from the characterisation of African state borders as arbitrary in a way that European borders, for example, are not. This is often more or less explicitly stated. Chumbow argues that ‘transborder languages are a fairly common feature of the African borderlines or frontiers and [...] they have a considerable amount of shared characteristics’ (1999: 51). Regarding the fact that Shangaan or Tsonga speakers are found in four different countries, for instance, Hachipola simply comments that it is ‘the legacy of the partition of Africa and colonialism’ (1998: 23). Similarly, Kishindo writes that the phenomenon of cross-border languages arises as ‘a result of several factors [...] The two most important ones are the partition of Africa and the emigration of tribal peoples’ (2001c: 43). Elugbe, however, takes a more nuanced view, arguing that ‘we should recognise an earlier prehistoric scramble which is responsible for the overlapping and discontinuousness of linguistic groupings in Africa’ and which the colonial partition merely exacerbated (1998: 23).

I shall begin this chapter by briefly discussing the state of ‘border studies’ in Africa. After a short survey of current research and policy on what are often termed ‘cross-border’ languages, I shall briefly examine three cases. These are the Bemba-Lamba cluster on the border between the Democratic Republic of Congo (hereafter the DRC) and Zambia; the

Kongo language of Angola and the DRC; and Somali, spoken in Somalia, 'Somaliland', Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti.

Tägil (1969: 23-24) refers to various classifications of boundaries, including the pioneering 1940s phenomenological approach of Boggs. More useful is the historical typology developed by Pounds in 1963, which consists of

- ❑ **antecedent boundaries** — drawn before the cultural landscape develops
- ❑ **subsequent boundaries** — drawn after the the cultural landscape develops and respects it
- ❑ **superimposed boundaries** — drawn after the the cultural landscape develops and does *not* respect it
- ❑ **relict boundaries** — which have no political function although they can still be seen in the cultural landscape.

Most African state boundaries have at least some of the character of superimposed boundaries, while speech communities are defined by relict boundaries that are significantly different.

As Chumbow has acknowledged (1999: 51), 'border studies' within Africa have been constituted as 'a sub-domain of scholarship in history since and even before Asiwaju', referring to the pioneering work of Professor Antony I. Asiwaju of the University of Lagos on transfrontier issues in Africa. But Africa's frontiers are not only the ones that mark the limits of the power of one state and the beginning of the power of another, nor are they as static as such a conception would seem to require. Historically, of course, 'pre-colonial African polities were defined by centers of power rather than by fixed boundaries' (MacGaffey 1997: 46). But there are social, symbolic, cultural and natural frontiers as well as the most visible state borders, and many of these have been in a constant state of change for the past few hundred years. One has only to think of the way the Ethiopia of Emperor Minilik II changed shape with the extension of Christian and Amhara influence in the late 19th century to understand this.

Achille Mbembe argues that there are two views of African frontiers, 'each of which ignores the other' (Mbembe 1999). The first I have already described: African borders were defined by the colonial powers in 1884 at the Berlin conference, which 'marked a turning point in the history of Africa and Europe' (Pakenham 1992: 254). At this conference the carving up of the whole continent took place, an exercise often described as the 'scramble for Africa'. Germany's leader, Chancellor Bismarck chaired the conference, attended by fourteen delegates from Russia, Austro-Hungary and the United States, as well as Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Holland and Belgium. The main players of course were Germany, Britain, France and Portugal. The Europeans divided the continent up to meet their own perceived economic needs; indeed their policies were 'directed to strategic and economic objectives such as protecting old markets or exploiting new ones' (Pakenham 1992: 254).

Just as Europeans carved the continent up among them, the African successor states must confront many challenges as they attempt to define and build a sense of national unity and mission in the confined states that they have inherited. One such challenge is how to deal with speech communities separated or affected by apparently 'arbitrary' borders. How can these inherited borders be turned to African advantage? For Africa to find itself it has to reject the objectives of the colonizers. It has to start looking at what will work for Africa itself and the development of African people.

Mbembe identifies a second kind of map of Africa, drawn on the basis of 'social and cultural solidarities' that can be symbolic, natural or physical, but which are constantly stretching or shrinking. A language map has, of course, exactly this character. There are at least four important maps of Africa to be drawn and superimposed, to capture the complex reality of African society as we know it. They include

- ❑ the colonial map and the map of successor states;
- ❑ the map of African regions and trade networks;
- ❑ the language and speech community map;

- the ethnographic map of African peoples.

None of these maps should be taken too seriously, or used for purposes other than the intended ones. We should remember that on the colonial map, ‘many of the lines [...] were drawn first with the infamous blue pencils of imperial delegates to late nineteenth century conferences. About a third of these lines are geometric [...] and] often reflect spheres of influence and trade carved out by the precursors of European colonialism’ (Fardon and Furnis 1994: 11). Obviously the ‘carving up’ process paid no heed to people who were divided by the infamous blue pencil.

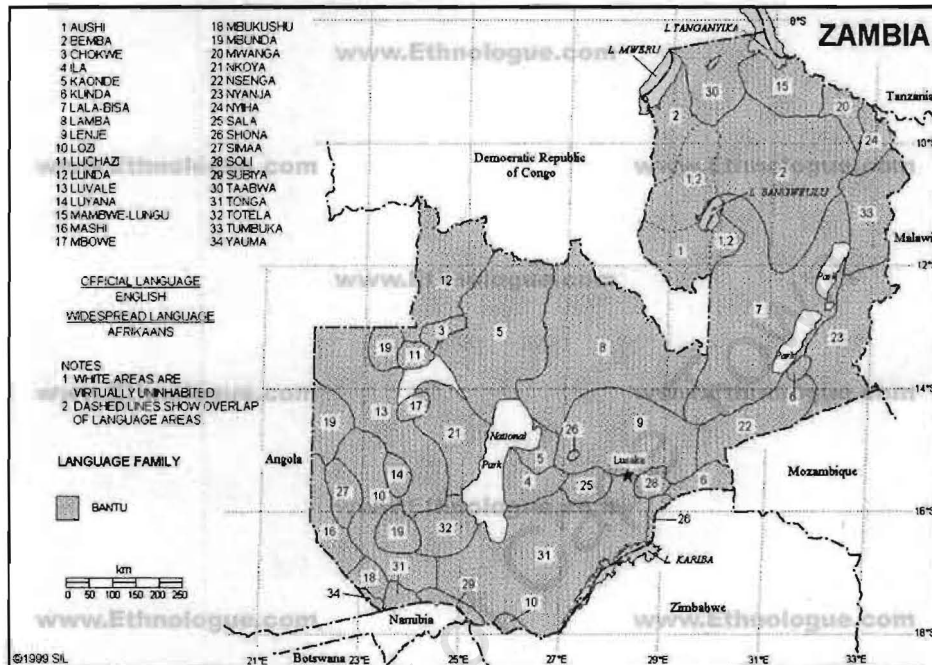
The African’s role was to contribute to the economic well-being of the colonial power. All over the continent, ‘tribes [sic] were characterized by their European colonizers as uniformly warlike, lazy, docile, good workers or the like, and were assigned to appropriate places in the colonial economy’ (MacGaffey 1997: 50). In the context of colonial occupation, the so-called ‘tribe’ was the social unit that lent itself to convenient administration or (from the point of view of missionaries) to convenient evangelisation. Its role was to function within the modern state, the colony. The ‘tribe’ was obliged to demonstrate some of the characteristics of the state—to have boundaries marking off it from other tribes, and a central figure of authority who made it possible for the newly-arrived district commissioner to say ‘take me to your chief’.

The Bemba-Lamba cluster: Splitting the Difference

Bemba and related languages of the Bemba cluster, including Lamba are spoken in an area that encompasses large swathes of central and northern Zambia. Cluster languages are also spoken in the south-eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (hereafter DRC), specifically in the long finger of Katangan territory that extends south/eastwards into the centre of Zambia (see map below). Other languages spoken in this panhandle include Aushi (related to Bemba) and Lala-Bisa (related to Lamba) (Grimes 2000). There are about 200,000 Lamba-speaking people in Katanga province of the DRC and in the Zambian Copperbelt (Grimes 2000). Bemba is much more widely

spoken, with about 2 million in Zambia alone and is widely used as a lingua franca as well (Grimes 2001; Kashoki 1978: 31-35).

**Map. Languages of Zambia,
showing Bemba (area 2) and Lamba (area 8)**



Source: Grimes 2000

The DRC is a former Belgian colony with a population of about 45 million people who speak approximately 200 to 250 different languages and dialects. Zambia is a former British colony with a population of eight million, who speak 73 languages (Kamwangamalu, 1997: 94). However, Zambia recognises seven major official languages, namely English plus six African languages: Bemba (the most widely spoken), Nyanja (the subject of this dissertation), Lunda, Lozi (closely related to Sotho), Lovale and Kaonde.

As a former Belgian colony, the DRC's official language is French, and several African languages are also recognised as 'national languages', a status whose significance remains unclear. These include, roughly in order of importance, Lingala (the lingua franca of culture and the military), Swahili (in its distinctive Congo variety), Kongo (also spoken in Angola; see below) and Luba. Speech communities that are split between the

southern DRC and Zambia include Tabwa, Lunda, Cokwe and Luba. (Kamwangamalu 1997: 90).

Local languages in both the DRC and Zambia enjoy low social status, whereas French and English have high status. The two inherited colonial languages serve as the medium of education, the mass media, and administration and diplomacy as well as for international business transactions. A command of these languages brings social status, and is the means to achieve upward social mobility. In contrast, local languages are mainly used for intra-ethnic communication. Over the years, local languages have been used in both countries as instructional media for the first two or more years of elementary school in the regions where they are spoken. Later on and higher up the educational system, French or English take over as the medium of instruction for the remainder of the education system.

This particular pair of languages, if they are indeed two languages, is known by different names in both the DRC and Zambia, and both countries officially consider them to be two separate languages (see map). Grimes (2001) lists them as separate languages, and they have different ISO-639 alpha-three codes (*bem* and *lam* respectively; see ISO 2002). There is no doubt that Lamba-speaking people in Zambia consider themselves culturally distinct from other ethnic groups in the country—recent reports in e.g. the *Times of Zambia* and other newspapers (1 January 2003) discussed a fierce dispute over chieftainship succession among the Lamba, a sure sign of awareness of tradition and distinctiveness. They are also famous for the vigorous and popular ‘*mayenge*’ dance. Urciuoli has argued that ‘when languages take on sharp edges, such as borders, they are mapped onto people and therefore onto ethnic nationality (which may or may not map onto a nation-state)’ (1995: 533). This seems to be what has happened here. Scholars such as Miti, however, argue strongly that different ethnic groups may speak a common language, or members of the same ethnic group may speak different languages (2001: 2). However, even its own speakers cannot objectively restrict a language, and ‘ethnicity [may] become non-localised [...] as is for example, the case with foreign languages, especially Spanish, in the United States’ (Urciuoli 1995: 533).

However, current scholars argue convincingly that, despite all these efforts to treat the two as separate entities, the 'lexical, phonological and syntactic evidence as well as social linguistic factors such as demography and status suggest that Lamba is a dialect of Bemba' (Kamwangamalu 1997: 93). Indeed, Kamwangamalu goes further, and argues that the Bemba cluster may be considered to include Lima, Lala and Swaka as well, on the basis of mutual intelligibility (Kamwangamalu 1997: 88).

In Southern Africa there are many cases of what might have been or still could be single languages that are known by different names on different sides of a political border. The focal language of this study—Nyanja—is a case in point, since it is still semi-officially called Chewa in Malawi but Nyanja in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Tanzania. The western Zambian language Lozi (or Silozi) is a variety of Sotho and is mutually intelligible with southern Sotho. The Shona language in Zimbabwe is closely related to both Venda, from the Limpopo province of South Africa, and to Ndaou, spoken across Manica and Sofala provinces in southern Mozambique.

Of course, there are many languages that coexist in frontier environments and that have a high degree of mutual intelligibility. This does not *necessarily* mean that they are varieties of the same larger cluster, or that harmonisation is possible or even desirable; in addition, they may have different social status on different sides of the border, especially where one variety is used as a medium of wider communication. Such a high status dialect will usually be identified as a language, while the variety with lower status and social value will be known as a mere dialect.

The situation with regard to these speech particular communities then, is that they are separated by various factors, including the fact that they have different names and different structures of traditional authority within the society. Harmonisation of Lamba and Bemba would be difficult even within Zambia, since they do not constitute either a community or a speech community there. It is linguistic analysis, not popular opinion, that has decided that they are variants of the same language. This situation is then *exacer-*

bated by the fact that Lamba is BSSC, and is a minor language within the DRC into the bargain.

We can see from this interesting case that

- ❑ form of speech (language) and ethnicity are not interchangeable categories;
- ❑ different ethnic groups may in fact speak the same language;
- ❑ the differential naming of languages is not necessarily a result of border straddling;
- ❑ harmonisation may be difficult or impossible even within a single state;
- ❑ whatever difficulties exist for a speech community are exacerbated by border straddling.

The Kongo Speech Community: Strong on Tradition

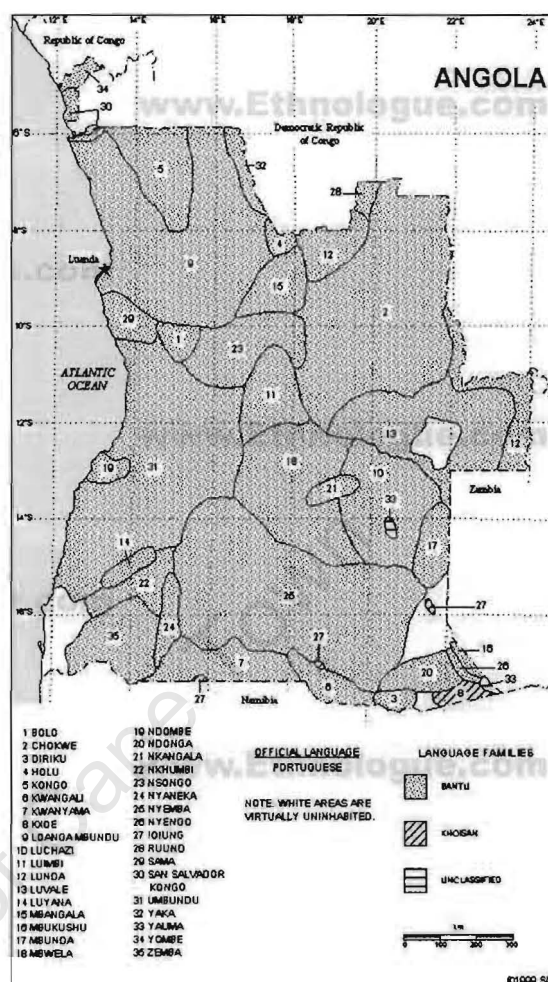
The Bakongo¹ people, heirs to the Kongo kingdom of pre-colonial times, still live today on both sides of the borders between northern Angola, the DRC and Congo (Brazzaville), in the area where they have been for centuries, 'lying seven degrees south of the equator and extending about 400 km. between the Atlantic coast of Central Africa and Kinshasa' (MacGaffey 1997: 45).

There may be as many as six million ethnic Bakongo distributed between the Republic of Congo (formerly the French Congo, and also known today as Congo-Brazzaville), the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly the Belgian Congo), and Angola (a former Portuguese colony). One source says there are about a million speakers of Kongo in the DRC, with a total for all countries of 3,217,000. If the Kongo-San Salvador variety is added in, there are another 1,500,000 speakers (Grimes 2000).

¹ The prefix *ba-* is used to indicate the plural of *-kongo* people; the prefix *ki-* (as in Kikongo) denotes the language.

The word ‘-kongo’ apparently signifies ‘a socially organised space’, such as a kingdom. The meaning of ‘mukongo’ (a Kongo person) or ‘mwisi kongo’ referred to the specific existence of such a kingdom, and signified someone living at the court.

Five hundred years ago, the Kongo kingdom at the mouth of the Congo River was the most important state in the area. At the height of its power, the kingdom reached from north-western Angola northwards as far as present-day Gabon. The Kongo social system was organised into clans, around the supposed religious and occult powers associated with witchcraft.



The Portuguese made contact as early as 1482, when navigators claimed the area as the territory of the Portuguese king. By 1489 diplomats and missionaries were on their way, and the ‘manikongo’ became a Christian, but ordinary *bakongo* violently resisted conversion. Within a short time, successor kings had become literate Portuguese-speakers, the Kingdom was reorganised administratively along Portuguese lines by the Kongoleses themselves, has expanded its influence, and had become profitably involved in the early Atlantic slave trade. By the end of the 16th century, however, the depredations of the slave raids and the pressure of invasions by the neighbouring Jaga people had led to serious decline. In 1885, the European powers returned to divide up this part of Africa into what became the colonies of *Moyen Congo* (the French Congo) and the Belgian Congo; the Portuguese began to assert effective control over Angola.

The Congolese Kingdom, already in decline as a serious political power, was thus effectively demolished and broken up by colonialism even as a socio-cultural entity, and the Congolese people now found themselves spread across three different colonial possessions of three different European powers.

Kongolese identity was weakened by this history of decline. The existence of colonial and post-colonial borders exercises and imposes a different reality: a Mukongo who is from the DRC side may say of another Mukongo from Angola side that 'he is not really Mukongo, he is an Angolan'. This kind of nationalistic ostracizing of 'the other' is quite common elsewhere in Africa. Nyanja-speaking Tanzanians such as myself may experience being described as 'not really Tanzanian, but Malawian'. The Haya people from the north-west of Tanzania may be termed Warundi (Burundians), as if they 'came from' Burundi. The pastoral and nomadic Masaai in East Africa face a similar erosion of their identity. In Kenya they are told they are Tanzanian and in Tanzania they are told they are Kenyan. They experience rejection from both more settled peoples in both countries.

The codification and harmonisation of Kongo is quite well advanced. In the 20th century, a 'unifying Kikongo language which was readily intelligible to all became established as a by-product of literacy and printing. In the cities however, the young no longer speak Kongo' (MacGaffey 1997: 55). The unifying cultural and political factor that had disappeared was the Kongo Kingdom, in which the language had been nurtured and people had been able to identify themselves as the Kongo speech community. The borders played a key role in destroying the already declining cultural cohesion of the Kongo people and the language suffered.

The example of Kongo reinforces what we learned from the European examples of BSSCs, especially Karelian:

- linguistic pressure is accompanied by pressure on cultural and religious identity;

- ❑ the economic interests of the 'border-defining powers' override the needs of the BSSC;
- ❑ a literary tradition will not guarantee language survival.

Somali: the Five-Pointed Star

Somali is widely spoken in four countries as well as in a diplomatically unrecognised pseudo-state, namely Somalia, 'Somaliland' (the pseudo-state), Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti. There is a Somali diaspora especially in Tanzania and East Africa, and communities of Somali speakers flourish in the Middle East, in Europe and in North America. There are between 5,400,000 and 6,700,000 mother tongue speakers in Somalia itself, with a total number of speakers for all countries of somewhere between 9,472,000 and 10,770,000 (Grimes 2000). This makes it numerically one of the major languages of the continent. There may be as many 15 million speakers altogether, since many Oromo in Ethiopia and Kenya speak Somali as a second language, as well as the Afar in Djibouti. Oromo and Afar are both closely related to Somali.

In Ethiopia, Somali-speakers are found mainly in the desert areas of the Ogaden, to the east of Harar town, where they now have a semi-autonomous regional government. Ethiopia and Somali fought a war over this territory in 1977-1978. In Kenya, Somali speakers are found in the eastern part of the country (see map below), in an area known as Mandera, where the borders of Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya meet.

There appears to be some correlation between varieties of Somali and the complex caste, clan and clan confederacy system into which the society is organised, but this is not entirely clear. Standard or Northern Common Somali is based on the Northern variety, which is understood by Banaadir Somali speakers but is hard for Maay (Central) or Digil (also Central) variety speakers to understand. Other important clans include the Dir, the Gadabuursi and the Isxaaq (Grimes 2000: s.v. Somali).

Somalia finally adopted an agreed orthography based on the Latin script in 1972, after many decades of argument about the use of Arabic writing (almost all Somalis are Muslims). The *ulama* favoured the use of Arabic script, since they used Arabic as a liturgical

language. Somali remains the official language of Somalia, but central government has broken down, and the former British territory seceded in 1991 to form the new state of Somaliland, which remains unrecognized by the international community. Somaliland has what is described as a 'fully functional government of its own', and a parliament. Somali was adopted as a language of instruction in schools in 1972, and it has an enriched vocabulary of modern scientific terminology as required for the range of school subjects taught. The language developed very quickly and by 1978 was being used as the medium of instruction from grades 1 through 12 (Owino 2002: 208). The BBC, Russian radio and the Egyptians use it in broadcasting and of course the national radio stations of Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti do too. Somali has a written literature and a rich tradition of oral literature including classical Somali poetry (Abdullahi 1999).

The recurrent desire of many Somalis to constitute a 'Greater Somalia' has been a regional political problem in the Horn of Africa for many years. The Somali flag is a five-pointed white star on a light blue ground. The five points represent the Italian colony, the British colony around Hargesia, the former French TFAI (Djibouti), the Ogaden province of Ethiopia, and Kenya's north-eastern frontier region.

Kenya and Somalia both gained their independence in the 1960s, and with independence approaching notions of the national state threatened to become entrenched. The Somali speech community was to be divided, since some were in Kenya and others in Somalia. This had the potential to create friction between the two countries, and the Kenya authorities held a referendum in the early 1960s for the Somali population to decide their future: the majority expressed a desire to belong to Somalia. The British ignored the referendum, as did the successor government of independent Kenya. The Somali population in Kenya became resentful, as their expressed desire through the referendum to join Somalia was ignored, and this resulted in a low-level guerrilla *shifto* war (the *Ishifto* or bandit war) throughout the 1960s.

Although Kenya and Somalia signed an accord in 1967, Mogadishu did give up its revanchist aims. Somalis in Kenya and Ethiopia are often seen as not fully citizens of their

countries, as being in some sense 'really Somalis' rather than Kenyans or Ethiopians. This has led to serious human rights abuse. In November 1980, for example, there was a major conflict in the region. Kenyan officials in the northeast province were murdered, which led to a security clampdown in areas and ethnic Somalis were confined in special security villages. Curfews were imposed. Somalis could not move freely, and police swooped wherever Somalis lived throughout Kenya. The army tore down Somali *manyatta*, burnt them and destroyed Somali homes.

Map. The Somali-Speaking Area of the Horn of Africa



Source: Abdullahi 1999.

Divisive colonial borders have a detrimental psychological effect on people whose national or ethnic or linguistic identity is open to ambiguous interpretations by themselves or others. As this example shows, people from the same ethnic group may be seen differ-

ently on different sides of a border, and may find themselves torn in unexpected ways. The identity attributed by the society tends to carry more weight. In this case one side sees itself as more Kenyan and sees 'the other' as foreign, as more Somali.

Despite cultural and religious obstacles, one could imagine that Somali might become a lingua franca in the four countries where the speech community resides. The early success in using it in the school system is proof that with appropriate political will, any African language can be developed to serve in the academic domain.

Is Somali a BSSC? Doubt arises because of the very large number of speakers, its status as an official language in two countries (Somalia and Ethiopia), and its successful use as a medium of instruction in education. However,

- Somalis are a minority in Kenya, and have suffered human rights abuses;²
- few Kenyan Somalis have risen to positions of authority, even in their own areas;³

But although *Somalis* as citizens may be under threat, it is far from clear that the same is true of their language. It is a codified state language, it has a literary tradition, a critical mass of ten million or so native speakers, a developed scientific terminology, and it is used in primary and secondary education. The threat to Somali comes from the collapse and division of the Somali state, not from the fact that the language community straddles borders. Indeed, the irony may be that the best-administered areas of 'Greater Somalia' today are the unrecognised Somaliland, and the Ethiopian 'Somali National Regional State'.⁴

² 'Inhabitants of Somali origin in Kenya's Northeast province are tired of being regarded as disloyal and would like to share in development' (*Africa Now* 1983: 35).

³ It used to be that Kenyan officials would hire anybody from another ethnic group, regardless of education or competence, rather than a Kenyan Somali. There was an attempt to reverse this in the mid-1980s (Robinsons 1984: 37).

⁴ See the news item 'UN ambassador rejects idea of Greater Somalia,' 12 February 2002. Available at <http://www.hamarey.com/index.php/article/articleview/74/1/4> [31 January 2003].

Conclusion

Official status and government support help languages to develop. We have seen that this is true in the European case studies, Karelian, Irish and Flemish, and in Africa, even in a collapsed and divided state such as Somalia. When inter-state or civil conflict exists, speech communities suffer: the Palestinian Arabs are an example. Even benign neglect or simple ignorance have an effect, as we have seen with the Kongo and Bemba examples, caught up in the accidental division of the speech communities decided long ago in Berlin. But such an historical accident can be corrected, through cooperation and through recognition that these languages are important, not only to speakers but also to the whole SADC community.

The challenge of building cooperation lies in education, in the publication of educational material and in the development of our BSSCs, our common languages that are spoken across inherited borders. Kenya and Ethiopia should cooperate with Somalia in a common educational programme for the Somali speech community. Kenya can build on the existing Somali language development already described. Other countries can learn from the specifics of the experience and from the general developmental strategies. These countries might also cooperate in publishing educational materials, sharing and reducing costs. Texts could be co-written so that geographic features and the daily realities of each country are appropriately reflected in the texts.

The overview and analysis of these two sets of BSSCs, the European and the African, requires synthesis. Are there common characteristics? Can the steady decline of minority BSSCs in Europe teach us anything useful for the development of language policy in Africa, a continent where there is virtually no possibility of financial or academic intervention in support of such minorities? Above all, what can we do to change the kind of politics that plays such a devastating role in the maintenance of the status quo?

In the first place, cooperation across political or state borders in this kind of sociolinguistic arena requires immense political will from both sides (or indeed, from *all* sides). It

also requires a more educated or sophisticated understanding of the notion of speech communities in general and of the characteristics and history of the specific speech community in particular. Lastly, it requires a recognition that re-united speech cross-border speech communities may bestow developmental benefits on their region, rather than represent a revanchist threat to the stability of the state and the ruling class.

University of Cape Town

Chapter 4

The NCM Cluster: a Divided Speech Community

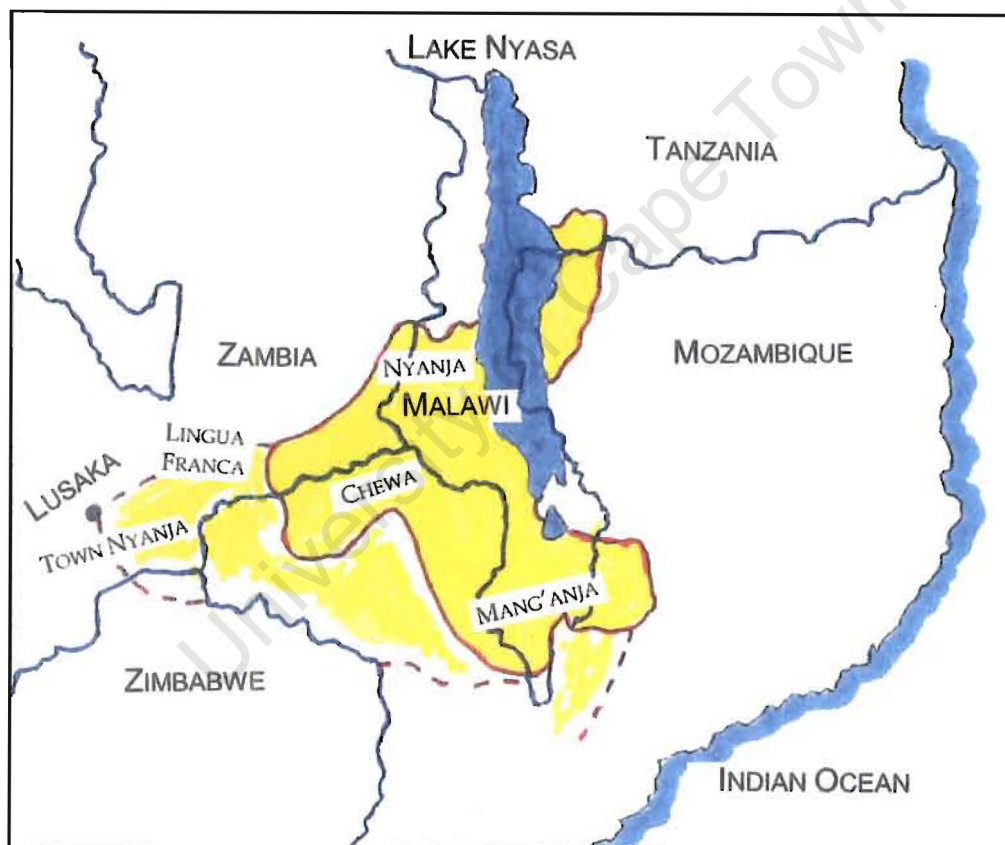
Introduction

This chapter has three objectives. The first one is to make the case for considering the Nyanja-Chewa-Mang'anja (NCM) cluster as a single language. The second objective is to summarise existing descriptions by grammarians and linguists of the current varieties. Third, I want to apply the concept of the BSSC and the typologies developed in earlier sections critically to the current situation of this cluster. I shall also examine different language policies in the five countries in which Nyanja is spoken. The chapter begins with an anecdotal account of my own experiences as a young child, growing up in the late 1960s in a Nyanja-speaking village on the lake, close to the Tanzanian-Mozambican border during a period of warfare. The section shows that our common language, Nyanja, actually linked the Tanzanian villagers on our side of the border with the guerrillas of FRELIMO (the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique), who were fighting on the other side for independence from Portuguese colonial rule, in a single speech community.

The (northern) Nyanja, (central) Chewa and (southern) Mang'anja varieties are spoken as mother tongues in a heartland that is made up of a contiguous territory in four countries. Nyanja is used as a lingua franca in a larger (western) contiguous area and also in a diaspora to the south. The components of the heartland are first, the southern and central regions of Malawi, and eastern Zambia stretching westward as far as the capital, Lusaka. Nyanja is also spoken in contiguous parts of Tete and in trans-lacustrine Niassa in Mozambique, and to a certain extent in Zambézia province as well. Lastly, a small minority of Nyanja speakers lives in the extreme south-western corner of Ruvuma region in southern Tanzania, also across the lake from the main

body. Because of Malawian labour migration throughout the late nineteenth and the whole of the twentieth centuries, Nyanja is also widely spoken in Zimbabwe. I shall discuss each of the areas in detail below. The map that follows shows (in yellow, outlined in red) the main area in which the NCM cluster languages are spoken, and also indicates the national borders of Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. This map alone should dispel any doubt about the status of speakers of Nyanja as members of a BSSC. Readers will also note that the areas in which Nyanja is spoken as a lingua franca are indicated, as well as the relative positions of the main varieties.

Map. The NCM Cluster as a BSSC



My Childhood Experience of Linguistic Identity

My father's clan, the Kambonapani, comes from the deep south of Tanzania, from Chimate village on the shores of Lake Nyasa, a few kilometres from Chiwindi, which marks the frontier with Mozambique's north-western Niassa Province. In fact, my paternal grandfather originally came from the Mozambican side of the border, but fled

to what was then German East Africa just before the First World War, and married a Chimate woman, my grandmother. My late mother was a Yao-speaker from the town of Salima in Malawi, a Yao-speaking enclave on the other side of the lake. Chimate lies in the district of Mbamba Bay, Ruvuma region. Although I spent my infancy in the Bemba-speaking regions of the Zambian Copperbelt, I lived in my father's home village of Chimate for several years as a young girl during the late 1960s and 1970s, before moving to Dar es Salaam, the Tanzanian capital.

In the early 1970s, the Mozambican liberation war, which had started in 1964, was in full swing in Niassa and Cabo Delgado Provinces, just across the frontier from my village. I can clearly remember villagers being awakened in the middle of the night by the arrival of FRELIMO soldiers trekking on foot through the bush from the Mozambican interior. The normally quiet village would suddenly burst into activity. Women would light wood fires and start to cook food for the hungry and exhausted fighters. Men would be seated under the big mango trees in groups with the *guerrilheiros*, holding a meeting. There was jubilation everywhere when the freedom fighters started singing and dancing, and the villagers would join in. After the soldiers had finished eating, they rested, and the whole village gradually went to sleep again. In the morning the fighters would be gone, back to *nkhondo*¹. The mood in the village would be subdued, with the only testimony to the previous night's celebrations the ashes and cooking stones still scattered about, showing that there had been more cooking than usual the night before.

Time passes—days, weeks or months. Then there is commotion again. The soldiers are back, but this time they look different, and there are fewer of them. I can't see some of the faces that I noticed when they were on their way back to the war zone. They are no longer in clean, smart camouflage uniforms, *pingas de chuva*.² Their clothes are torn and bloodied, and some of them are wounded, perhaps seriously. This time there is considerable urgency in their interaction with the villagers. This time there is no celebration, but rather anger, fear, panic and bewilderment shows on their faces. All the villagers look sad and afraid, as the women busy themselves cleaning

¹ Nyanja: war.

² Portuguese: raindrops, a nickname for a particular East German camouflage material favoured by FRELIMO.

and dressing the fighters' wounds. Food is prepared quietly, and the wounded soldiers are fed first. Village men and the *FRELIMISTAS* hold a meeting, and then we all go to sleep. In the morning, just like before, all the soldiers are gone again, leaving worried looking villagers behind.

I remember understanding that these FRELIMO fighters, foreigners in a formal sense, were really part of our community in another, deeper way, part of 'us'. They spoke Nyanja—our language—with us, and sang the same songs and danced the same dances as we did. They were our brothers, our cousins, our children, and our kin. They were villagers going to war against the alien Portuguese, who were a threat to everybody living in the area. I never saw them as foreigners or as Mozambicans fighting to liberate their—as opposed to our—country. In fact, I was unaware that Mozambique was a different country. I had the impression that these were the children of Nyanja people, fighting an enemy a few kilometres away, an enemy who terrorised us all with helicopters and aeroplanes. If the FRELIMO soldiers had not been there to stop them, I imagined, they might have come to our village one day and attacked us.

The common denominator was our common language. It united soldiers and villagers with bonds of trust and community. The Mozambican fighters were seen as children or kinfolk, belonging to village society. Whenever they arrived, they were welcomed, fed, given advice and information, looked after and supported. In the end, I suppose, the Portuguese never had a chance.

The NCM Cluster: a Divided Speech Community

As has already become clear, there is a problem of terminology in writing of the groups of people who speak, variously, Nyanja, Chewa and Mang'anja. Alternative names—either for the language as a whole, or for specific varieties, include chiChewa, chiPeta, chiMang'anja, chiNyanja and chiNyasa (Mchombo, undated 'a'). This plethora of diverse names for the languages and the people reflect the fragmentation of and the multiple identities that exist within the greater speech community. The language has at least three names, with variant forms and spellings. The people themselves are often referred to in the older texts as the 'Maravi' people as we shall see below.

I propose to use the term 'Nyanja' for both the people and the language, unless I am referring specifically to the cluster of varieties, when I shall use 'NCM cluster'.³ If there is a specific reason to use another name, I shall do so, for example in the discussion of Malawian language policy under Banda. This preference should not be interpreted as Nyanja revanchism or indicative of a desire to impose this name on others. There has in fact been some debate in Malawi since 1994 about the wisdom of abandoning the name Chewa. In February 1999 the country's Ministry of Education announced officially that the language was now to be called Nyanja, a change that is reflected in the most recent textbooks, grammars and dictionaries (e.g. Centre for Language Studies 2000; Nkhoma 1999). Nonetheless, a recent survey of members of parliament reported that half believed that such a change was not 'in the best interest of the nation', with a majority of mother tongue speakers in favour of maintaining the status quo (Matiki 2002). Other commentators have produced what seem to be muddled and pseudo-historical arguments in favour of maintaining a distinction between the Chewa and Nyanja peoples and their dialects (Kathewera 1999: 108).

The divisions are reflected not only in the names given to varieties of the language, but also in the orthographies, of which there are three, one for each of the countries where the language is used in primary education. The most recent revision of the Malawian orthography was undertaken in 1990 (Chichewa Board 1990), although according to Bwanali (2001: 38) a set of proposed revisions sent to the Ministry of Education in 1997 were still awaiting approval at the time he was writing. The Zambian orthography, however, has been established, apparently without revision, since 1977. In the meantime, the Mozambican Nucleus for Mozambican Languages, better known by the Portuguese acronym NELIMO, at two major meetings in 1989 and 2000, was establishing an orthography of its own. The table below gives some examples of differences regarding both phonetics and word division between the three versions of the spelling. It is interesting to note the influence of Portuguese phonetics on the Mozambican orthography (e.g. <dj>, <dz> and <kh>) and also that the differences seem to be

³ 'Nyasa' is simply the *Swahili* word used in Tanzania to refer to the people and their language. Their own name for themselves is 'Anyanja' which means 'lake people'.

distributed between all three variants. I shall return to the implications of this for the publishing industry below.

Malawian Orthography	Zambian Orthography	Mozambican Orthography	English Meaning of Word or Phrase
chimanga	Cimanga	cimanga	maize
jambulani	jambulani	djambulani	to draw
ku sukulu	Kusukulu	kusukhulu	at school
lumikidza	Lumikiza	lumikidza	to join
mmimba	m'mimba	m'mimba	in the stomach
Ntchito	Nchito	nchito	work
pa chulu	Paculu	pa culu	ant hill
zipatso	Zipatso	dzipatso	fruit

Adapted from Mwale 2001: 64.

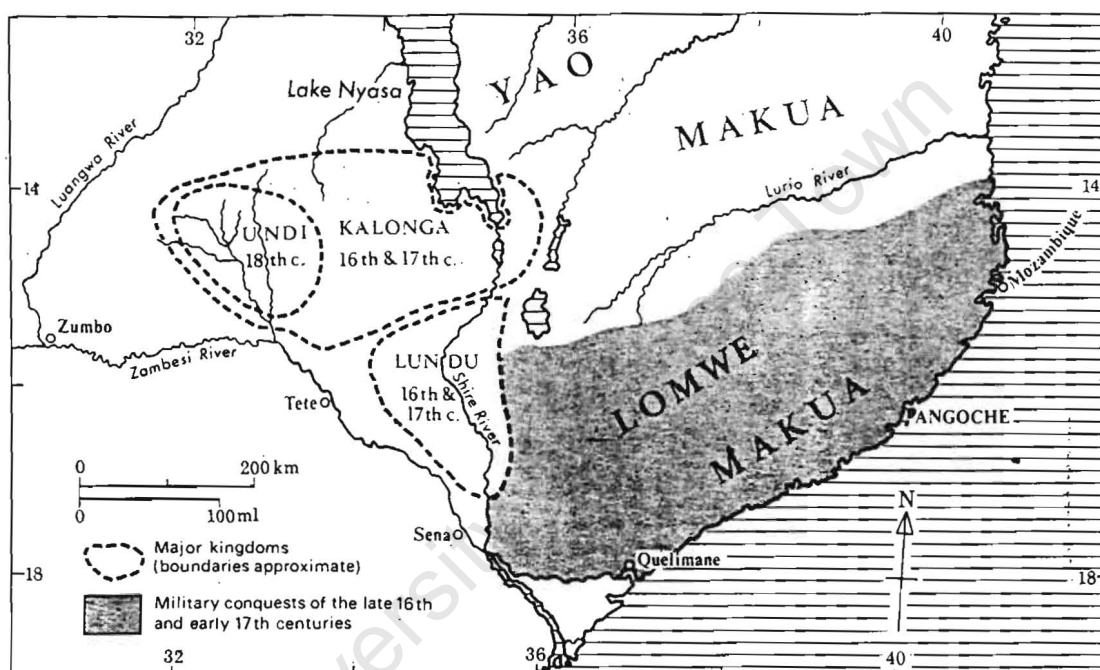
Nonetheless it is clear that, at least as far as education is concerned, serious if low-key efforts are in fact being made to discuss the harmonisation of orthography between Zambia and Malawi at the very least, both at the theoretical level and the political level (see e.g. Bwanali 2001; Chisoni 2001; Nyirenda and Thodi 2001). I will return to this issue below.

The Origins of the Maravi People

Although the term is not in current use, the European explorers and missionaries of the nineteenth century and earlier knew the speakers of the NCM cluster of languages first as the Zimba and later as the Maravi. From this latter word the Republic of Malawi derives its name. There is a rich historical and anthropological literature on the origins of the Maravi people in both English and Portuguese, the earlier part of which is usefully summarised by the Portuguese colonial administrator and anthropologist Rita-Ferreira (1966: 13-41). Of course, many if not all of these versions of the origins of the people served the purpose of legitimising either Maravi political power or colonial domination, and should not be treated as objective historical accounts. Nevertheless, it does seem that the Maravi were migrants from the Congo who appeared in the historical record for the first time when they established an extensive polity on the left

bank of the Zambezi river from around 1500. They then fragmented into various smaller chieftainships, of which the most important historically were the Karonga and the Undi (Rita-Ferreira 1966). This was the basis of the ideological construction of an historical 'Maravi Empire' (see map below) that was used by Hastings Banda, the first president of Malawi, to justify various expansionist plans in the 1960s and later (Hedges 1989: 623-625).

Map 2. The Maravi 'Empire', 1700 to ca.1850



Source: Alpers 1975: 48.

The distribution of the Maravi peoples seems to have been roughly along the following lines, as summarised by Rita-Ferreira from the earlier accounts:

- The *Nyanja* people, who were divided into three sub-groups, namely:
 - The *Nyasa*, along the eastern shore of the lake;
 - The *Mang'anja*, in the lower Shire valley and in Tete, intermixed with the *Nyungwe* and the *Sena*;
 - The *Nyanja* proper, around the southern tip of the lake;
- The *Chewa*, along the Capoché and Luia rivers and in present-day Zambia

- The *Senga*, to the west of the Chewa.

The Maravi themselves recognised four main clans under Karonga, namely the Phiri, the Banda, the Nkhoma and the Mwali (Young 1950). These surnames remain extremely common among Nyanja speakers, and especially Malawians, to this day.

The Maravi were relatively peaceful and partly because they had already split up into minor chieftainships by the time the English and the Portuguese arrived, were especially susceptible to the divide and rule tactics of European colonialism. Indeed, the Europeans themselves saw the Maravi people as being 'much more fond of the home pursuits' of weaving, metallurgy and agriculture, than of trading and travel (David Livingstone, quoted by Alpers 1975: 23). As Young wrote of the Maravi over fifty years ago:

'[they] live under at least six different names according to the area in which Europeans found them in the closing decades of the [nineteenth] century. And they were more or less on the same ground at least 300 years earlier since the Portuguese records give some of them the same names as they bear today' (1949: 53).

Varieties within the NCM Cluster

The codification of the Nyanja language by Europeans has a long history going back to the nineteenth century, and starting with the publication of Riddel's grammar (1880). George Henry published a second and more comprehensive grammar eleven years later (1891), and a dictionary by Scott appeared a year later (1892). Scott's dictionary was revised and enlarged by Hetherwick (1929), which is still the authoritative bilingual dictionary, while Hetherwick's own grammar had been printed in 1901. All these works called the language either Nyanja or Mang'anja. In 1937, however, a North American anthropologist called Mark Hanna Watkins published *A grammar of chiChewa* as a supplement to the journal *Language*. The significance of Watkin's choice of '*Chewa*' as the name of the language becomes apparent when we discover that his informant was a young Hastings Banda, then a student at the University of Chicago. With hindsight, we see Banda laying the groundwork for his later language policy as President of Malawi, by playing a key role in the codification of the particular variety—and the language name—that he himself favoured. One can assume that,

when Banda later claimed that Chewa was a 'language with rules' he was referring to the grammar in the creation of which he had played a determinant role (Mchombo undated 'a')

Although it seems that dialectal differentiation within the NCM cluster is not large, it is clear that the internal historical dynamic of the Maravi themselves, combined with the impact of colonialism, which distributed the original territory inhabited by Nyanja-speakers between four colonial possessions and two colonial powers, has in fact resulted in the emergence of some varieties. These varieties are related in various ways to the distribution of the subordinate polities referred to in the anthropological literature mentioned above. At present this whole question seems to be under-studied, in the sense that I was unable to find a single modern account of Nyanja dialects by a qualified linguistic scholar. The most recent systematic study seems to be that by Fortune (1959), which lists several characteristic distinctions in five varieties of Nyanja.

Nonetheless, there are various versions of what the Nyanja dialects might be or probably are, to be found in the works of the large-scale classifiers of the Bantu languages. These classifications derive, by and large, from the major large-scale language surveys of the African continent, and are based on a wide range of sources of varying quality. In this thesis, I do not propose to analyse the scientific basis for the existing definition of NCM varieties, nor am I equipped to do so. However, it is useful for our purposes to summarise the conventional wisdom as represented by Doke and Cole, Guthrie, and Dalby, even though it is hardly based on modern research. Indeed, in a recent survey, Nurse (1999: 14) comments that 'it is often suggested that the groupings [...] are valid' but goes on to disclaim any specialised knowledge. The Swedish scholar Jouni Maho is less tactful. He describes the present state of classification as 'a veritable mess' (Maho 2001: 40).

More than half a century ago, the South African scholar C. M. Doke offered a classification that was subsequently revised by Cole (Doke and Cole 1961: 87) as follows. They oddly include Tumbuka under a larger grouping labelled Nyasa, also include a

variety labelled Mbo, and anticipate modern opinion by classifying (N)Senga⁴ and Kunda as close relatives of Nyanja:

Zone 52 (East Central)

52/2 (Nyasa)	52/2/1 Tumbuka	
52/3 (Western)	52/3/1 Nyanja	52/3/1a Mang'anja
		52/3/1b Chewa
		52/3/1c Mbo
		52/3/1d Peta (Maravi)
		52/3/1e Eastern Nyanja
	52/3/2 Nsenga (Senga)	52/3/2a Kunda (Fort Jameson)

In a simpler structure, Guthrie (1967-1971) classifies Nyanja as Language Group N.30 in Zone N, consisting of the following varieties:

Nyanja	N.31a
Cewa	N31b
Mananja	N31c

He also classifies the closely-related (N)Senga-Sena languages as Language Group N.40, with the following varieties

Nsenga	N.41	Spoken in Zambia
Kunda	N.42	
Nyungwe	N.43	
Sena	N.44	
Ruwe	N.45	
Podzo	N.46	

It is unclear whether the Nsenga classified here by Guthrie as 'N.41' with the note 'spoken in Zambia' is the same language that was reclassified by the Mozambican body NELIMO (1989: 34) as a Nyanja variety (see footnote above). A Zambian mother tongue speaker, who is a professor at the University of Venda, has recently published detailed studies of Nsenga grammar (Miti 2001) and tonology (Miti 2002). Although Miti's work focusses on the Nsenga spoken in Chipata district in Zambia and in Mchinji district in Malawi, we will presumably soon be in a position to evaluate the Mozambican decision properly as a result of this work.

⁴ From the older sources, it seems that there may be at least two and perhaps three languages/varieties called variously Senga and Nsenga, sometimes also confused with Sena. One of these is probably a Nyanja dialect.

Dalby (1999: 9) offers a slightly different and more detailed classification, as the following extract shows:

99-AUS-xa	chi-nyanja + chi-chewa		Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique
99-AUS-xaa	Chi-nyanja-F	Standard Nyanja, Zambian Nyanja	Zambia
99-AUS-xab	Chi-nyanja-U	Town Nyanja, Lusaka Nyanja	Zambia
99-AUS-xac	Chi-chewa-F	Standard Chewa Malawian Chewa	Malawi
99-AUS-xad	Chi-chewa-W		Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique
99-AUS-xae	Chi-nyanja-S		Malawi, Mozambique
99-AUS-xaf	Chi-nyasa		Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania
99-AUS-xag	Chi-kunda-N	Transition towards Bemba	Zambia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe
99-AUS-xb	Chi-peta		Malawi
99-AUS-xd	Chi-manganja		
99-AUS-xf	Chi-nsenga		

Dalby's '99-AUS-x' class also includes several other languages or varieties, such as Pimbi, Nyungwe, Sena, Bangwe, Podzo and Hwesa, which may be closely related to Nyanja, but which are treated as separate languages by such scholars as e.g. Hachipola (1998).

It is perhaps worth commenting on the status of Mang'anja. Some modern writers assign Mang'anja the status of a dialect of e.g. Sena (see Hachipola 1998: 64), but there seems little doubt that it is an alternative name for Nyanja, a dialect of Nyanja or even an intermediate variety between Nyanja and Sena. As long ago as 1901, Hetherwick was dismissive of ambiguities, stating confidently that 'MangUanja [is] a merely local pronunciation of the word A-Nyanja' (1901: 15).

Let us now look at the situation of Nyanja in each of the countries where it is spoken.

Chewa in Southern Malawi: a Variety Imposed

Nyanja became the national language of Malawi, with English and under the official name of Chewa in 1968. The name change led to immediate confusion in some quarters. Indeed at least one otherwise quite well-informed source implies that this was a *language* change (Phillips 1998: 6). If the examples that we examined in chapters two and three are any guide, the change probably led to an effective lowering of the language's status overall.

Why did Malawi adopt Chewa as its second language after English? The first census data to do with language in Malawi dates back to 1966, two years after independence, when 50.2 percent of the population identified themselves as mother tongue Nyanja speakers. At least 76.6 percent of the population claimed to be able to speak Nyanja even if it was not their original language. But Nyanja had also been favoured and adopted early on by the English colonial administration and was the language of the police and the army in those times. It was a required and examined subject for promotion in the colonial civil service, and was included in the syllabuses of the Cambridge School Certificate for both Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia in the 1940s. The Nyanja people, having become a favoured proto-elite, were also contrasted by the British with the lazy and drunken Lomwe and the intelligent Yao as 'industrious, quiet and peace-loving' (Kayambazinthu 1999: 44-45). Colonial policy as early as the 1930s encouraged the use of Nyanja as a lingua franca, and by the 1950s the only difficulty was seen as being the preference for Tumbuka in the north.

The adoption of this admittedly contested policy led logically to codification and standardisation, most notably in the *Chinyanja Orthographic Rules* of 1931 and their subsequent revisions. Indeed, as Kayambazinthu points out, Nyanja came to 'dominate colonial administration for vertical communication' and this advantage carried over into the post-colonial period. (1999: 47).

In 1968, the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), the only legal political grouping at that time, resolved that Malawi should adopt Nyanja as a national language alongside English, and at the same time change its name from Nyanja to Chewa (Matiki 2002). Tumbuka thus lost its semi-official position at a stroke. The decision may appear to

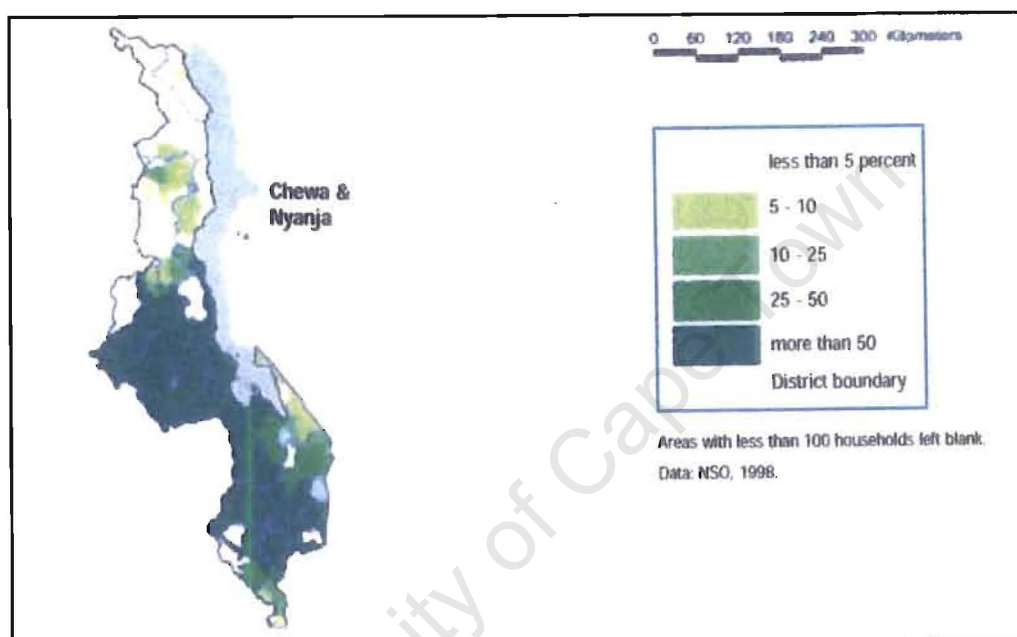
have been based on simple population arithmetic, but it can be convincingly argued that Banda's personal nostalgia for the 'pure' village Kasungu Chewa of his childhood was a determining factor. Banda disliked the southern Mang'anja dialect, as well as the Nyanja of Zomba, to the north of Blantyre (Chimombo and Chimombo 1996: 11; Kayambazinthu 1999: 50).

Nyanja (or Chewa) has remained in reality a low status language for many years, its use being prohibited in parliament, for example (Matiki 2002). Uneducated and rural people make up the majority of speakers. The 1968 decision also created considerable resentment in the north and elsewhere among speakers of other local languages. Despite the adoption of Chewa as a national language, English has continued to dominate both officially and educationally. This is not, of course, a situation that is peculiar to Malawi, as Matiki has pointed out (2001: 205). However, language policy is 'incoherent and contradictory', and the 'only real official function of Chichewa is in its role as a symbol of national identity' (Matiki 2001: 205). Malawi kindergartens are used to give small children an advantage in English competence, and 'routinely conduct their classes in English' (Matiki 2001: 206). Competence in English is the key to access to employment, to the mass media whether print or broadcast, to the political system, to the judicial system, and so forth. Malawian writers such as Zeleza (1997: 36), and Matiki (2001: 210) have forcefully pointed out the anti-democratic character of such a society. In Malawi English equals education, which equals social privilege in its turn.

Banda stifled social science and educational research in Malawi for many years, requiring that proposals be vetted by the secret police and that anything that might make Malawians 'a laughing stock' be abandoned (Van Breugel 2001: 9-10). It was considered genuinely dangerous to attempt to circumvent these restrictions, and as a result much remains unknown for the post-independence period. Although there are a small number of novels and plays in Nyanja, the Banda period after independence in 1964 was not a fertile one for local literature. Writing in anything other than the Chewa variety of the Central Region was actively discouraged, and the school texts selected for study were usually older writings from the 1930s. Even modern texts in the Zomba dialect of Nyanja were discouraged. (Chimombo and Chimombo 1996: 11).

The 1998 census makes a puzzling distinction between Chewa and Nyanja, but reports that 57 percent of the population spoke the former and 13 percent the latter. The census does not apparently distinguish between mother tongue speakers and others, since the question asked for the language used ‘within the household’, so it is hard to see if total numbers or even proportions of speakers have risen or fallen since 1966 (Population and Housing Census 1998: xv). The following colour map shows the distribution of speakers of the two varieties in the country as a whole:

Map. Distribution of Nyanja/Chewa Speakers in Malawi, 1998



Source: Malawi: *An Atlas of Social Statistics, 2002*, chapter 6, available at <http://www.nso.malawi.net/>

The figures for Chewa and Nyanja speakers, broken down by gender and by urban/rural residence, for the Central and Southern regions are as follows, with a total number of speakers—from a total population of around 9,790,000—close to seven million, of whom the overwhelming majority are rural people:

	Urban	Rural	Total
Central Region			
Chewa			
Men	248,292	1,582,125	1,830,417
Women	229,793	1,636,905	1,866,698
Nyanja			
Men	6,939	10,007	16,946
Women	6,055	11,252	17,307
Southern Region			
Chewa			

Men	266,915	679,043	945,958
Women	245,701	723,731	969,432
Nyanja			
Men	39,423	549,447	588,870
Women	38,197	600,238	638,435
Total	1,081,315	5,792,748	6,874,063

Adapted from Population and Housing Census 1998: 81 (table 7).

It seems likely that Malawi is the country where Nyanja language evolution is most dynamic, although changes in Zambia are probably under-reported, given that the underlying socio-political developments—multi-party democracy, press freedom and vigorous political debate—are similar. The creation of political neologisms has been an important outcome of the democratisation process in Malawi, particularly in popular newspapers, and especially since the legal enactment of press freedom in August 1992. Nyanja neologisms appear in regular newspaper supplements such as *Chichewa* in the *Enquirer*, *Tchutchutchu* in the *Saturday Post* of Blantyre, or *Tikambe* in the *Malawi News*. These seem normally to consist of several pages each of news items and opinion pieces. This has been an essentially ‘bottom-up’ process, independent of any formal language planning policy imposed from above, and has also been an entirely local process. Chimombo and Chimombo identify several concrete new forms of expression that have emerged (1996: 35-46). These include straightforward borrowing of words or phrases (usually from English) and the extension of meaning of existing Nyanja words. Kamwendo (2000: 186-203) in a more broadly focussed study examines shifts in the political discourse of the country.

At the most basic level, newspaper neologisms present problems of achieving an established spelling according to some kind of phonological system: for example, the word ‘referendum’ appears variously as *referendumu*, *refarendamu* and *riferendumu*. But as Chimombo and Chimombo point out, the conventions of Nyanja grammar forbid an initial ‘r’, so that the English word ‘report’ becomes the Nyanja *lipoti*. This is also important because there is a Nyanja noun class, number 5, which is the li- class, and a hypothetical **lifelendumu* form would presumably fall into that class (1996: 36). Similar borrowings include *puleshala gulupu* (pressure group), *matipate* (multi-party) and *prezidenti* or *pulezidenti* (president) (1996: 39-41).

The extension of meaning of existing Nyanja terms has also presented complications. For example, two different nouns derived from the verb *kusankha* (to select) have come to mean election(s), namely *chisankho* and *masankho*, but the verb itself is not used for 'to vote'. Another example is *chipani*, originally meaning a meat-skewer, which has shifted meaning to 'political party'. As Chimombo and Chimombo argue, this shift was probably strongly influenced by the authoritarian style of the three Banda decades, in which political choice was an alien concept (1996: 38).

Kamwendo makes the point regarding the 1999 elections that the use of Nyanja in, for example, political manifestos, is essentially aimed at 'the uneducated' (2000: 194). Even so, when politicians attempt to speak in Nyanja, they fall into code-switching habits that may even impede listeners' understanding (2000: 195).

In Malawi the use of local languages such as Nyanja is now being discussed in areas outside the usual educational and media arenas. Kishindo, for example, has recently published a paper arguing for the use of African languages in the legal system in Malawi, despite problems with several aspects, including the tendency towards polite euphemism (2001b: 1-27). The term for rape in Nyanja, for example, is *kugwililira*, which really means to grab or to catch: another common expression is *kuchita chipongwe mkazi* 'to be insolent to a woman' (Kishindo 2001b: 6 and 23).

In a recent survey of Chewa writing in Malawi, Pascal Kishindo argues that despite a hesitant start and a long period of censorship and repression under Banda, Chewa literature is currently undergoing 'an outburst of creativity' even if many works are unlikely to endure (2001a: 168). Early Nyanja fiction in the 1930s had a clearly proselytizing role, and most stories involved some sort of journey from the darkness of heathenism to the light of Christianity. S. J. Nthara's story *Nthondo*, Josiah Phiri's *Kalenga ndi Mnzache*, and S. A. Paliani's *Kunadza Mchape* all have essentially this character. Later fiction became less overtly evangelical, although it remained highly didactic. Some poetry and short stories have been published in various newspapers. Kishindo identifies Benedicto Malunga as the major poet writing in Chewa today (2001a: 160). However, despite the fact that some Zambians are also writing in Nyanja, Kishindo's undeclared assumption here is that he is dealing with a *Malawian* literature. Although there is drama and fiction in Nyanja, most Malawian writers pre-

fer to use English as their medium of expression. According to one commentator, the fact that publishers think in terms of fragmented *national* markets means that they see a 'market [that] is generally confined to numerically unattractive ethnic boundaries' such as Zambia or Malawi (Ng'ombe 1999: 104).

Interestingly, in the post-Banda period there has also been a flowering of linguistic and lexicographical publications on Nyanja in Malawi. A monolingual dictionary, *Mtanthauzira mawu wa Chinyanja* was published by the Centre for Language Studies in 2000, and a technical grammar of Nyanja and in Nyanja, *Kuphunzira Chinyanja*, by Wisdom Nkhoma, appeared in 1999. Interestingly, both these books preferred to call the language Nyanja, although the dictionary uses Chewa as an alternative on the title-page.

There is a substantial literature on the use of Nyanja and other African languages, permitted since 1994, in the Malawian education system. Indeed, an important conference was held at Mangochi in October 2000 on precisely the theme of 'Local Languages in Education, Science and Technology', and its proceedings were subsequently published by the Centre for Language Studies, the former Chewa Language Board (Pfaffe 2000). This rich collection includes papers on orthographic revision (Batibo 2000; Kawale 2000; Nyirenda 2000), the use of Chewa and other languages in mathematics education (Kaphesi 2000; Kishindo and Kazima 2000), developing learning materials (Chiziwa 2000; Thodi 2000), and so forth. What emerges clearly is that there is a high level of academic interest in mother tongue instruction among Malawian educators. Whether the political will exists to turn this interest into concrete practice, or to do so taking into consideration the cross-border nature of Nyanja, is another, as yet unanswered question.

Nyanja in Zambia: the Eastern Lingua Franca

In Zambia, Nyanja is the mother tongue of a significant group of speakers, but even more importantly, it fulfils the function of a widespread lingua franca, especially in the capital, Lusaka (Fortman 1978: 182). As a result, it has always enjoyed a degree of official recognition and has played an important role in the print and broadcast media and in education. However, Zambia, unlike Malawi, was never able to impose a

particular African language by administrative decree, and so Nyanja's importance has always remained secondary to the most widely spoken Zambian language, Bemba (iciBemba). The most detailed accounts of Nyanja's social, political and educational role in Zambia remains the Ford Foundation-commissioned national language survey from the late 1970s (Ohannessian and Kashoki 1978), which includes chapters on education, the media and literacy, among other topics.

Nyanja is spoken in Zambia's Eastern Province. According to Grimes (2000), the Kunda spoken in Zambia, and mentioned in Dalby's classification as '99-AUS-xag' is in fact a completely intelligible variety of Nyanja that is distinct from Mozambican Kunda, which is a variety of Sena.

In contrast to Malawi, it is quite difficult to establish reliable current figures for the number of speakers of Nyanja in Zambia, either as a mother tongue or as a *lingua franca*. In the 1970s, Serpell was complaining that 'statistics of the population classified by language are scant in Zambia, and the situation does not seem to have improved (1978: 148). The now seriously out-of-date 1977 figures for mother tongue Nyanja-Chewa speakers in Zambia, as collected by the researchers of the Ford Foundation language survey, were as follows:

Language	Male Speakers	Female Speakers	Total	Percentages
Chewa	95,103	101,537	196,640	4.9
Nyanja	129,993	126,595	256,588	6.4
Total	225,096	228,132	453,228	11.3

Source: Kashoki 1978: 20.

This figure is clearly too low to be relied upon. Zambia's 1969 census results had shown that 755,000 people, or about 17 percent of the population, spoke one of the languages of the Nyanja group. However, the Ford researchers also looked at the use of Nyanja and other Zambian languages as *lingua franca*, and produced the following figures (in percentages):

Area	Bemba (percentage)	Nyanja (percentage)
Zambia as a whole	56.2	42.1
Zambia, rural areas	46.0	36.6
Zambia, urban areas	83.8	57.2

Source: Kashoki 1978: 32

If we extrapolate from these percentages on the basis of the current Zambian population of 9,370,000, we can see that there are possibly as many as 3.9 million people with some grasp of the language in the country. Grimes (2000), basing her figure on a 1993 source, guesses at 989,000. This leaves us with a range of somewhere between just under one million, up to the possible but unlikely figure of just under four million speakers.

Zambian educational policy has never placed much emphasis on African languages, despite rhetorical gestures. The 1929 school syllabus in Zambia, copied from the Ugandan one, covered all classes up to Standard VIII and mandated nine periods per week for English against only one for 'vernacular languages'. This reflected the need of the colonial government for African junior clerical staff, and both parents and the children themselves saw English competence as a path of advancement. In the 1930s there was little educational (as opposed to religious) material even in Bemba, and what was available was of a poor standard. The solution adopted was to translate standard texts into Nyanja and other languages. However, 'vernacular was the subject which aroused least interest among teachers and children once the mechanics of reading and writing had been mastered. In addition, there was little worthwhile literature produced in any African language, including Nyanja' (Snelson 1990: 160-161).

Until 1965, all classes in non-fee-paying primary schools in Lusaka at least were taught in Nyanja for the first four years. The Zambian government then changed the language of instruction to English (Serpell 1978: 148; Ohannessian 1978b: 292). There seems to have been little written on the subject of teaching African languages, including Nyanja, in Zambian schools since the 1970s, when the Ford Foundation survey included some papers on aspects of this (Ohannessian 1978b: 292-328; Ohannessian 1978a: 355-397). However, in 1996 a new policy was adopted which reverted to the idea of initial literacy in a 'familiar language'. In the late 1990s, the Zambian

government adapted the South African 'Breakthrough to Literacy' methodology, with permission, to the national situation, and Nyanja again became one of the languages used in primary education to teach reading and writing (Sampa 2001: 53, 55).

Nyanja in Tete and Niassa: Belated Recognition

According to NELIMO, the Centre for the Study of Mozambican Languages, Nyanja is presently spoken by just under half a million people in Mozambique, in several districts of Niassa Province, eight districts of Tete, and in an enclave in Zambézia. In Niassa, Nyanja is spoken in the capital, Lichinga, and in the northern districts of Lago and Mecanhelas (in both of which it is spoken by a majority of the population), as well as in Mecula and Sanga. In Tete Province as a whole, Nyanja is in fact the most widely spoken language, and is the majority language in the districts of Angónia, Macanga and Chiúta. In Zambézia Province, a small number of Nyanja speakers are concentrated in Milange, on the Malawian frontier.

Nyanja was one of 23 languages identified in the Mozambican national census of 1980, the first since independence, according to which it was then spoken by 385,875 Mozambicans or 3,3 percent of the population of 11,6 million (Firmino 2002: 81). By 1997 this number had increased to 497,671 (NELIMO 2000: 85), probably mainly as a result of the reclassification of Senga (or Nsenga). Cisenga, which had been recognised as a separate language by the 1980 census, had been reclassified by NELIMO in 1989 as a variety of Nyanja, for scientific reasons that are unknown to me (Firmino 1989: 34). The reclassification was part of a general move to reduce the number of Mozambican 'languages' classified as such from the 23 of the 1980 census to 13.

In 1980, the language thus ranked tenth in number of mother tongue speakers in the country, above the better-known Chope and Makonde, for example. At this time 98,8 percent of the Mozambican population spoke one African language or another (i.e. not Portuguese) as their mother tongue.

NELIMO (2000: 85) recognizes four dialects and treats the last one, Cinyanja, as the standard:

Cicewa or Spoken in Macanga District, Tete

Cimaganga	
Cingoni	Spoken in Angónia District, Tete
Cinsenga	Spoken in Zumbo District, Tete and in Fingoé Locality, Tete
Cinyanja	Spoken in Niassa Province and in Angónia, Tsangana and Moatize districts, Tete

The variety of Nyanja spoken in northern Niassa province is identical to that spoken in Tanzania. Indeed, my own grandfather was from Cobuè (Kobwe), in Niassa, and travelled north to my family's home village of Chimate in search of a wife. He married my grandmother and returned home. Some years later the whole family moved back to my grandmother's place (Nkhoma 2003).

The 1997 census gives percentage figures for the numbers of Nyanja speakers in Tete and Niassa (the number for Zambézia is too small to be worth calculating. As can be seen from the following table, it is in Tete province, to the south of Zambia and the west of Malawi, where the majority of Nyanja-speakers are to be found:

Province	Population	Number of Nyanja Speakers	Nyanja speakers as percentage
Niassa Province	605,600	50,870	8.4
Tete Province	922,300	446,390	48.4
Zambézia	2,310,100		*4.4

**of the district of Milange only*
Source: II Recenseamento 1997.

Nyanja has been used in primary education in Mozambique. It was one of two languages selected for an experimental programme in mother tongue education known as PEBIMO, after its Portuguese title, Projecto de Escolarização Bilingue em Moçambique, or 'Mozambican Bilingual Education Project'. This ran from 1992 to 1995 in Tete (the other language was Shangaan, used in schools in Gaza province in the south). PEBIMO began in five schools in Tete with children entering the first year, and was subjected to external evaluation in 1996, as the same students were doing the fourth year. Each class had at least 45 children, none of whom knew any Portuguese (Benson 1998: 282).

The project was run by INDE (National Institute for Educational Development) with funding from both the UNDP and the World Bank. The objective was to achieve liter-

acy in the mother tongue, Nyanja, while simultaneously teaching a command of Portuguese so that literacy skills could later be transferred. Spoken Portuguese was introduced only in the last three months of the second year; Nyanja continued to be the only language of instruction right through to the end of the third year, when the switch to Portuguese took place (Benson 1998: 279-282).

Five main conclusions were drawn from the PEBIMO experience. These were that an appropriate model for bilingual education must be adopted, ideally involving mother tongue instruction right through to the fourth or even the fifth year. Second, teachers need to be trained in the methodology of L¹ teaching. Third, teaching materials must be prepared ahead of time. Fourth, parents and members of the community need to be brought on board, and those that reject the idea of bilingual education must be offered an alternative. Last, the programme must fit into the national educational policies and programmes of the ministry of education (Benson 1998: 296-298).

Nyanja in Southwest Tanzania: a Peripheral Minority

There is very little published information available on Nyanja as spoken in a handful of fishing villages in the extreme southwest of Tanzania, just to the north of the border with Mozambique, where my family comes from. Dalby (1999: 9), as cited above, seems to imply that the variety spoken in Tanzania is in fact Nyasa, but this is unsupported elsewhere in the literature. As a Tanzanian mother tongue speaker of Nyanja, I can testify that I have never heard the language called Nyasa by other speakers. However, the fact that both the Nyanja people and the Nyanja language are always called 'Nyasa' in Swahili (*Wanyasa* and *Kinyasa* respectively), leads to the hypothesis that Dalby has simply confused the Swahili terms with the Nyanja ones. Another possibility is that Dalby is confusing Mpoto with Nyanja, since the former is apparently also sometimes called Nyasa.⁵ None of this is to deny, of course, that Tanzanian speakers may sometimes use characteristic and identifiable intonation and sentence structure.

How many Tanzanians are Nyanja-speakers? Census data does not help us, as language questions are not asked. The Summer Institute of Linguistics will only commit itself to 'a few' speakers in Tanzania, and does not show the language on its map,

⁵ Not enough is yet known about a possible relationship with Nyanja (Grimes 2001, s.v. Mpoto).

having only Mpoto in the extreme south-west (Grimes 2000). A web page apparently belonging to Spanish missionaries says that there are 35,000 speakers, but it is unclear where this figure comes from and what period it refers to. Indeed, there is so little published data on this question that a recent Web resource on Tanzanian languages mentions Nyanja only as the result of information provided *that was based on this very research* (Maho and Sands 2002).

A possible reason for the marginalisation of Nyanja is political. The most prominent Tanzanian Nyanja speaker was Oscar Kambona, who opposed the socialist 'Arusha Declaration' of 1967 and subsequently went into exile, where he plotted against the Nyerere government. As a result, many Nyanja speakers, including close relatives of mine, were persecuted and jailed through guilt by association. One may speculate that this period led also to a *linguistic* marginalisation that continues to the present day.

No local or regional languages are used for educational purposes in Tanzania; the only languages of instruction are Swahili in primary education and English at all other levels.

The Diaspora: the Malawian *ulendo* in Zimbabwe

There is no question that Nyanja speakers in Zimbabwe are labour migrants who have arrived there in the last hundred years or so, and thus constitute a diaspora rather than a settled language community. They appear to be subject to the usual social processes of integration with surrounding speech communities.

Grimes (2000) gives the number of Nyanja speakers in Zimbabwe, according to the 1969 census, as 251,800, a large number given that Zimbabwe's total population was only 7.4 million. The 1992 census did not include a question about language, so it is probably impossible to establish how many speakers there are currently in the country.⁶ Even with census data, it is possible that people of Malawian origin in Zimbabwe

⁶ A file containing a scanned image of the census questionnaire is available from the Website of the IPUMS-International Project of the University of Minnesota's Population Center at <http://www.ipums.org/international/index.shtml> [29 January 2003]. The only question about ethnicity simply offers four options, African, Asian, European and Mixed Race.

would want to disguise their ethnic origin and assimilate to the majority Shona or Ndebele groups.

The Zimbabwean Nyanja are without question a 'hidden' speech community. Virtually the only published source on Nyanja or Chewa speakers in Zimbabwe as such is the short chapter (1998: 54-57) on the language in Hachipola's recent book *A survey of the minority languages of Zimbabwe* which looks at sixteen languages outside the usually-depicted Shona-Ndebele dichotomy. The book is the result of a survey conducted under Hachipola's direction by a group of research assistants in 1993, and may perhaps therefore be regarded as a primary source on the topic.

Hachipola is absolutely clear in his indication that the Nyanja-speakers of Zimbabwe do not constitute a settled community, but rather a diaspora, although he does not use this last expression⁷:

'the Chewa do not form a community in any part of this country [i.e. Zimbabwe]. They came into the country as migrant labourers [... and] they have to a large extent kept their identity, at least as far as language is concerned' (Hachipola 1998: 54).

This is correct, although Hachipola seems to believe that labour migration from the then Nyasaland to the then Southern Rhodesia dates significantly only from the 1930s. In fact, Nyasa migrant workers were being actively recruited into Southern Rhodesia as far back as the late nineteenth century, a fact that would to some extent explain the wide dispersal and the survival Nyanja-speaking communities in the country.

To understand why Nyanja is widely spoken in present-day Zimbabwe it is necessary to know something about the history of labour migrancy in central Africa during the colonial period. Despite Hachipola's ahistorical implication that Nyanja-speakers (who were 'naturally ambitious and liked to travel') were looking 'to work in every conceivable place where they could secure a job' (1998: 54), the forebears of today's Nyanja-speaking Zimbabweans were in fact organised labour migrants to the Rhode-

⁷ The term diaspora was first used in connection with the Malawian tendency to travel by Bridgial Pachai (1968).

sian mines. These *ulendo* (the word originally meant a 'party of travellers' in Nyanja) were migrant workers who had begun to travel to Southern Rhodesia and South Africa as early as the last years of the nineteenth century (Makambe 1980: 548).

Without going into too much detail, in the last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, African workers from what was then Nyasaland (now Malawi) were much in demand among employers in Southern Rhodesia, who believed that the mission-educated Nyanjas were good employees. They were particularly needed in the mines, and many of them travelled as far as South Africa, a situation that has continued more or less to the present day. Demand for African labour in both Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland had outstripped the supply, so there were vigorous attempts by the colonial authorities in Nyasaland to prevent cross-border labour emigration.

In the 1930s, in selected mine schools, some teaching in Nyanja for the Malawian community seems to have occurred, apparently using Zambian materials, but this seems to have died out subsequently (Hachipola 1998: 56). Nyasaland migrant workers may have been seen by mine employers as more educated than their Rhodesian counterparts, and when the mines established schools, teachers were also recruited from Nyasaland. Since the vernacular was used up until Standard VI, Nyanja textbooks were imported from both Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia in this period. With the growth of local Zimbabwean nationalism and subsequently the achievement of independence, Nyanja-Chewa gradually disappeared as a medium of instruction in Zimbabwean schools (Hachipola 1998: 55-56). Since Malawian labour migrants and their descendants are now scattered all over the country, it is hard to see that Nyanja would ever be re-established in Zimbabwean schools, even if it were to be studied at university level, for example (Hachipola 1998: 57).

Conclusion

In 1958, Hastings Banda wrote in *New Commonwealth* that

'... if, for economic reasons, Nyasaland must enter into a sort of union with any other country, then union with Tanganyika is much more logical and sensible than that with Southern Rhodesia. Nyasaland has much more in common with Tanganyika, geographically and ethnologi-

cally, than she has with Southern Rhodesia. *This is also true of the north-eastern part of Northern Rhodesia.* The boundaries between Nyasaland and Tanganyika or Nyasaland and this part of Northern Rhodesia are artificial, and of European creation, to suit the convenience of the early settlers and the Powers in London and Berlin. There are tribes in Nyasaland, parts of which live both in Tanganyika and north-eastern Northern Rhodesia. Among other things, therefore, union of Nyasaland with Tanganyika, either alone or with north-eastern Northern Rhodesia, would unite these tribes.' (Banda 1958: 312).

But Banda's revanchism is an unreliable guide to the nature of Nyanja as a BSSC, despite the fact that it is an important explanatory factor in the analysis of *Chewa* language dominance in modern Malawi. The fact is that Nyanja remains a low status language in all the countries where it is spoken, including Malawi, subordinate to either English or Portuguese, and in some cases to other African languages as well, such as Bemba, Swahili, or the southern languages of Mozambique. Indeed, in Tanzania, the language is considered so marginal that it does not even appear in the standard surveys. Against this must be weighed the clear commitment of at least part of the Malawian academic intelligentsia to the use of Nyanja and other African languages particularly in education (see e.g. the resolutions passed at the National Language Planning Conference printed in Pfaffe 2001: 160-161).

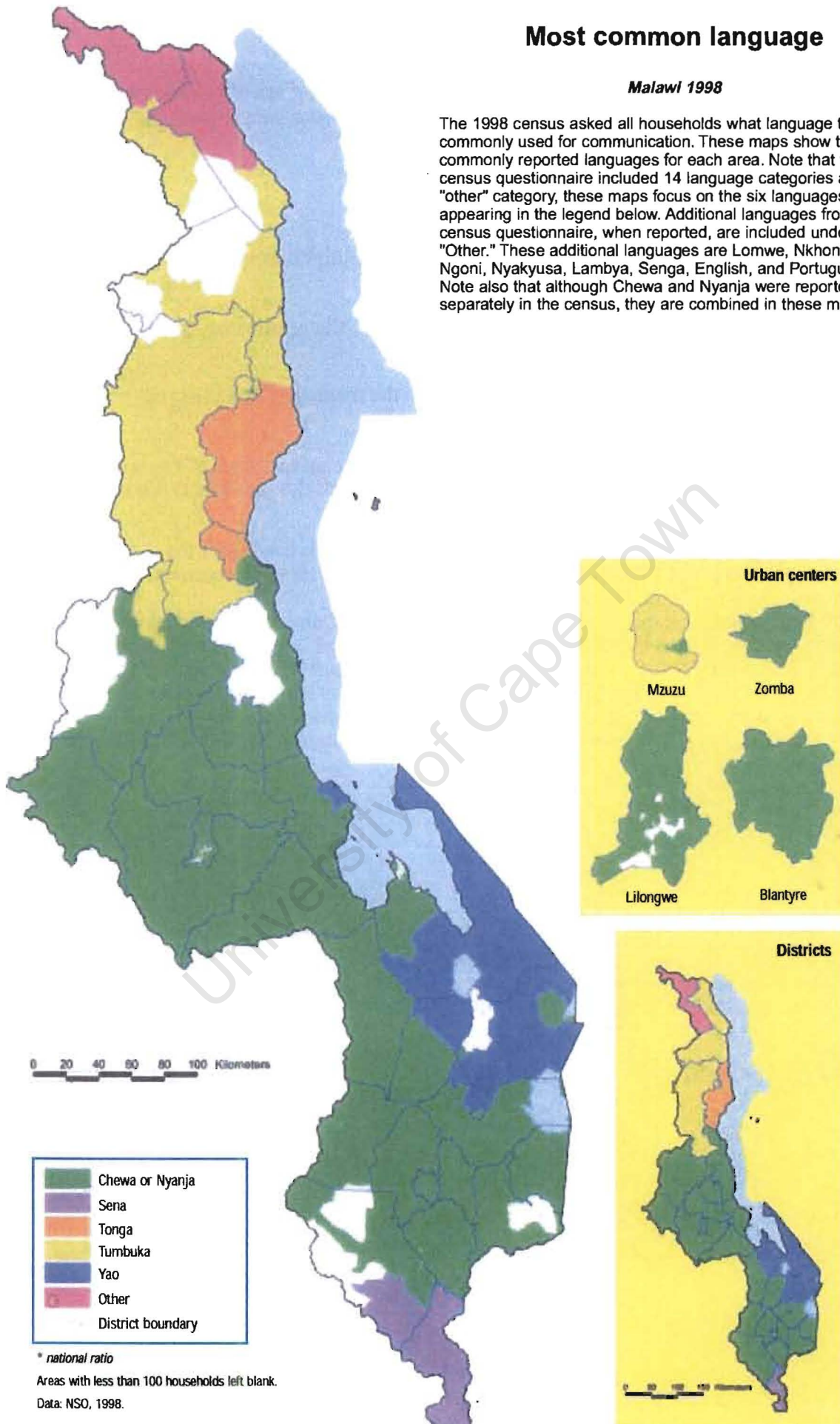
In summary, therefore, we can say that

- although the NCM cluster may have as many as ten million speakers, its dialects remain under-studied and its boundaries unclear;
- the legacy of Banda's Chewa nationalism continues to confuse perceptions about the relationships between varieties;
- recognition of the NCM cluster as a BSSC remains limited to a few specialists in sociolinguistics and education;
- like other African languages, the NCM cluster has low status, even in Malawi;
- however, there are encouraging signs of some recognition among academics and intellectuals in NCM-speaking countries of the need for and the possibilities of cross-border cooperation.

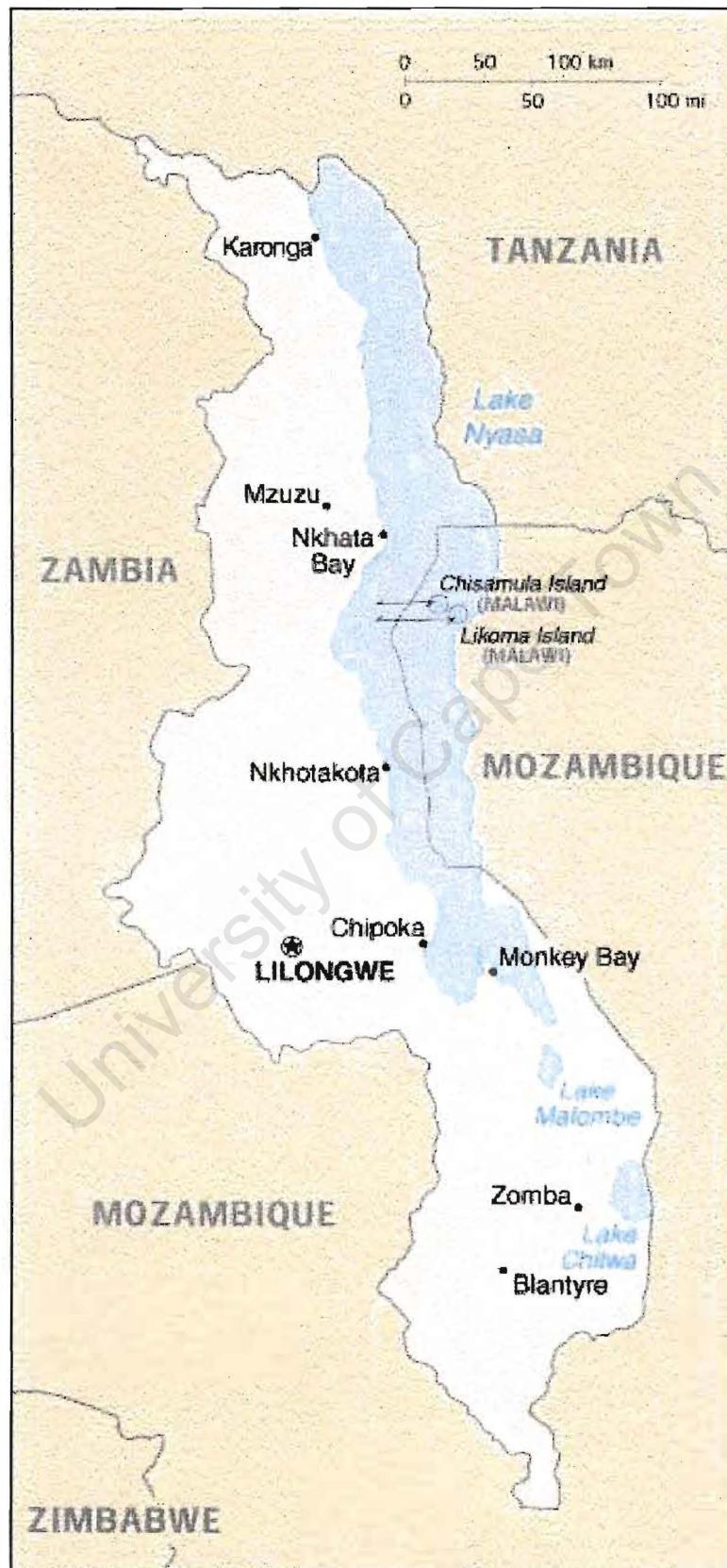
Most common language

Malawi 1998

The 1998 census asked all households what language they most commonly used for communication. These maps show the most commonly reported languages for each area. Note that while the census questionnaire included 14 language categories and an "other" category, these maps focus on the six languages appearing in the legend below. Additional languages from the census questionnaire, when reported, are included under "Other." These additional languages are Lomwe, Nkhonde, Ngoni, Nyakyusa, Lambya, Senga, English, and Portuguese. Note also that although Chewa and Nyanja were reported separately in the census, they are combined in these maps.



Source: Malawi: *An Atlas of Social Statistics*, 2002, chapter 6, available at <http://www.nso.malawi.net/>



Chapter 5

Language Planning, Publishing and Education for the BSSCs in Africa

What do we learn, as educationists, language planners or publishers, from specific and concrete case studies of BSSCs either in Europe or in Africa, such as the ones we have examined in earlier chapters? What are the commonalities and the distinguishing characteristics of these examples? Is it in fact possible or necessary to *theorise* the BSSC beyond the simple idea of the 'cross-border' or 'trans-border' language? Let us examine some of the educational, political, human rights and economic implications of the marginalisation of African and other BSSCs, in the contexts of language planning, language death and the agreed desirability of mother tongue education for, at least, primary school learners.

Status planning and corpus planning for the BSSCs

Implicit in everything that has been examined until now in this study has been the idea that a language planning intervention for the NCM cluster (and analogous clusters) is a rational and desirable measure for the governments of the five countries where these languages are spoken. Indeed, the need for practical and immediate steps is a common theme in the literature on BSSCs in Africa. Chumbow, for example, describes an idealised language planning hierarchy of 'Transborder Language Planning Committees' and 'Transborder Language Commissions', the former made up of linguists and other specialists and the latter of political decision makers (1999: 64-66). But some of what he describes is based on concrete experience in Nigeria and Cameroon with the Ejagham and Gude languages (1999: 65). Similarly, the important workshop on cross-border languages held in Namibia in September 1996, already referred to, made a series of quite specific recommendations regarding Kwanyama, Lozi and Tswana (Legère 1998: 229-231). At a similar meeting in Mangochi, Malawi, in August 2001, fourteen resolutions were passed by the participants, mainly emphasising the importance of mother tongue education (MTE), but also demanding that 'efforts be made to

continue and expand regional cooperation with neighbouring countries regarding mother tongue education issues' (Pfaffe 2001: 161). These local initiatives could even be pushed further, and one might wish to see, for example, a bureau or commission at the level of the African Union or UNESCO to drive the language planning processes that are necessary if we are to save the African languages that are under immediate threat.

Interestingly, there is an historical precedent for this kind of process from the colonial period. According to Whiteley, the Inter-Territorial Language Committee, later known as the East African Swahili Committee, and covering Tanganyika, Zanzibar, Uganda and Kenya, was set up by the British in January 1930. It survived until 1964, when it became the Institute for Swahili Research at the University of Dar es Salaam and lost its 'inter-territorial' character. The ITLC succeeded in standardising Swahili orthography, grammar and syntax within the educational system around the Zanzibari variety, but has also been criticised for creating a stilted and foreign-sounding style of expression (1969: 79-95).¹

If four or five African governments are to cooperate in language planning for the NCM cluster, as did the ITLC for Swahili, they will typically need to intervene at two levels, usually referred to as 'corpus planning' and 'status planning' (Francis and Kamanda 2001: 225). This is true regardless of whether the planning process is conceived of in terms of a participatory process or an authoritarian and top-down one.

By corpus planning, we may understand the process by which a standardised and agreed orthography, syntax, grammar is arrived at, based either on a fairly artificial 'harmonisation' of existing varieties of the language, or on the selection of a particular variety. In either case, the process is best with political as well as technical or linguistic difficulties. For example, the 1928 choice of the Zanzibari variety (*Kiunguja*) of Swahili over the Mombasa dialect as the basis for the new standard or official language (*Kiswahili sanifu*) predated the foundation of the ITLC by some two years. Nonetheless, the 'bitterness which this decision engendered was slow to subside' (Whiteley 1969: 80-81). Indeed, as Francis and Kamanda point out, although the

¹ In popular usage, such a style is sometimes even called *Kizungu* (European language) or even *Kiseri-*

process of language planning is usually presented as a rational one, in fact it is 'inextricably linked with politics' and is 'usually informed by ideological, political and sometimes, the private interests of the governing elite' (2001: 226).

Status planning is an area that most governments in Africa seem to shy away from. To harmonise Zulu and Xhosa *politically* into a written standard Nguni, for instance, to be taught in schools, would be a Herculean task for any South African government, even though the linguistic challenge would be relatively simple to overcome.

African Language Death—or Linguicide?

The plain truth is that many threatened African languages and varieties are likely to disappear within the next hundred years, many of them probably before they have been properly codified. Of course, the distinction between the concept of a 'language' and its 'dialects' and 'varieties' is in practice essentially a political rather than a scientific one. Nevertheless, the recognition that a person's way of speaking is a 'language' is emotionally significant for those whose social and cultural identity is at stake. We need only think of the strong feelings aroused in such debates as that about the role of Afrikaans in South Africa to acknowledge that this is so. In Malawi, Banda's strong attachment to 'Chewa' and his critical role in its codification and subsequent adoption as an official language, discussed in chapter four, was also of this character (Kayambazinthu 1999: 50). This is not to deny that there are good reasons for a strong attachment to one's mother tongue, reasons that are more than just emotional or sentimental. A person's language 'is a feature of his [sic] life just like his sense of space. In fact, language has many of the same properties: we orient ourselves by it, and—even though it is verbal—we are unaware of its presence in our thinking because it is the very medium of our experience.' (Leavitt, 1985: 263)

Of course, the idea that African people should fight for the validation of African languages is scarcely original, either academically or politically. The problem is how does such a battle manifest as *an actual change in language behaviour*? One of the defining moments in the post-colonial struggle over language took place at the Conference of African Writers of English Expression, held in Uganda in 1962. A youthful

kali (government language).

Ngugi wa Thiong'o was at the conference and adopted what was then seen as a 'radical' position alongside the Nigerian critic Obiajunwa Wali. Wali's later essay 'The dead end of African literature' was published in *Transition* in 1963, and provoked a storm of controversy. Wali argued that African literature, under the influence of foreign models and written in foreign tongues, was doomed to sterility. Over a decade later, in 1977, Thiong'o finally abandoned English as a literary language in favour of his mother tongue, Kikuyu, and has maintained his position of principle ever since (e.g. Ngugi, 1983). However, he remains, if not a lone voice, then a lone example, as the overwhelming majority of African literary figures continue to write in English, French or Portuguese.

Languages that are not codified, that are not used for written communication or education, that are seen as 'belonging' to the 'talk domain' of rural or working class people, are often under threat. Languages that miss the vibrancy created by the higher domains of usage (the worlds of work, education, government), tend to stagnate rather than grow. Increasingly, language loss and death and its consequences are attracting scholarly—and even political—attention. There are about 6,000 languages currently in use around the world (although the number that has existed throughout human history is larger, perhaps greater than 30,000 (Crystal 2000: 11). A very few languages are spoken by millions, but most are used by very small groups. Indeed, about half the languages spoken today are used by fewer than 100,000 people, and a quarter by less than 10,000. Less than ten percent of the total number of languages are codified or transcribed. Even among written languages, there are massive inequalities. According to UNESCO figures, about 65 percent of all printed materials are in English, which has official status in 45 countries (Ly, 1997) Two questions naturally arise: 'How can widely-used or national languages [such as Nyanja] resist the encroachment of English? And how can minority languages in danger of extinction be saved and gain access to development?' (Breton 2000: 24).

With few speakers, no written form, and low social status, it is hardly surprising that some languages perish. As far as we know, ten languages are disappearing every year, and scholars and others have made apocalyptic predictions of losses of up to ninety percent of existing languages in this century alone (Bjeljac-Babic 2000: 18). To some

extent this is borne out by past experience: over the last 200 years, over ninety percent of Aboriginal languages in Australia have vanished (Ly, 1997).

But to speak of languages simply 'dying' makes the process seem a natural one. But there is a parallel to be drawn between linguistic diversity and bio-diversity, in the sense that both require a particular protected environment if they are to survive.

Do languages just die, or are they in fact killed? Some commentators think that language death is the result of deliberate policy. In this view, the eradication of a language, termed 'linguicide', has invariably been associated with the 'deculturation of peoples [...] perpetrated by colonisation and is still the semi-official aim of governments which do not recognise the rights of [...] minorities' (Breton, 2000: 24). Exclusion of a language and its speakers from the educational system is an essential part of such a process, whether consciously driven or not.

About 31 percent of world languages are spoken in Africa (Crystal 2000: 4 [foot-note]). As discrete 'languages', like the languages of Europe, they are socially constructed, invented, artificial. As the old witticism has it, a language is a dialect with an army and a navy. In Africa, however, the process of defining and developing *in colonial times* what might have become, in different circumstances, national languages, has often resulted in division rather than in harmonisation.² This is both bad news and good news. African languages may be underdeveloped, but they may therefore be more susceptible to planning decisions, if we can make rational ones.

The story of the unifying role of specific and politically dominant varieties of French, German, or Spanish in the construction of the national identities of those countries is well known. Languages such as Occitan (Provençal) in France, or Galego (Galician) and Catalan in Spain have been reduced to the status of mere regional dialects, while the dominant varieties have assumed the (contested) national titles of 'French' or 'Spanish'. Such processes have been rare in Africa—the cases of Lesotho (Sotho), Somalia (Somali), or Tanzania (Swahili) being possible exceptions.

² Neville Alexander and others have argued for the harmonisation of the Sotho and Nguni languages of South Africa into standardised literary languages. But the arguments against his ideas demonstrate the complexity of such a project.

In Africa, unhappily, the colonial dynamic has been determinant. What might have been seen as varieties of Nguni or of Sotho have come to be considered full languages, with their attendant ideologies of nationalism and tribalism. The story of the development of a distinct Thonga-Shangaan language in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provides an exemplary tale of how such processes have often worked, and of the non-linguistic determining factors. In the 1880s and 1890s, Swiss missionaries in the Transvaal published several grammatical and religious works in a newly codified language that they dubbed 'Gwamba'. However, in the mid-1890s, Henri Junod, a missionary in Lourenço Marques in Mozambique, began to publish works in a closely related variety that he in turn labelled Ronga. This provoked Henri Berthoud, the mission's expert on Gwamba, to argue that these two *lingua franca* should be treated as one, to save on printing and other costs and to avoid dividing the religious congregation. Unfortunately, Berthoud died in 1904, and the division between Gwamba (by now termed Shangaan) and Ronga has persisted to this day—indeed, a third variety, Tswa, was codified as a separate language in the meantime by yet another group of American missionaries (Harries 1989: 86-87). As we have seen in an earlier chapter, Banda performed an analogous process of defining Chewa away from Nyanja and Mang'anja in Malawi from the 1960s to the 1980s.

Marginalised languages sometimes have a strong motive to support and accept harmonisation, since it has the potential to turn small minorities into bigger ones, with more political clout. For instance, at a meeting in Windhoek in April 2001, San-speaking delegates from Namibia, Botswana and South Africa agreed to work on a harmonised or standard orthography for the main varieties of San, constitutionally unrecognised in South Africa. It appears that the definition of what these actually are remains contested. Delegates attacked, using politically charged terminology, the idea that there is such a thing as a 'Khoisan' people. The concept, they argued, is a political ploy to subjugate San culture and language to that of the Nama and Griqua peoples. Attempts 'to lump the Khoi and San languages into one group' were described as 'smacking of apartheid practices' (Grobler, 2001: 34).

Occasionally the ongoing extinction of a language takes place in full public view, although this does not seem to do more than delay the inevitable outcome. A case in

point is =*Khomani* San, whose most famous speaker was the late Elsie Vaalbooi, who died in her nineties on 7 October 2002 (Gosling, 2002; South African San Institute, 2002). Vaalbooi was unusual in that she was recognised as one of the last speakers of an ancient language, and therefore as one of the last representatives of an ancient culture, while she was still alive and active. Something of a local celebrity, she had articles written about her, she was interviewed on the radio, she featured in a television documentary, and professors of linguistics trekked to her home near the Namibian border (Koch, 1997). As a result of all the attention, it is now known that there are at least eight fluent living speakers of her language, also known as *N|u* (South African San Institute, 2002). However, attempts to win government support for a *N|u* language project were initially unsuccessful, and it was only with Elsie Vaalbooi's death, and subsequent media attention such as a strongly worded editorial in the *Cape Times* of 10 October 2002 that prospects improved.

Mother Tongue Education for African Children

Of the 6,000 languages spoken in the world today, only about 100, or less than two percent, are used for education (Breton, 2000: 24). Significant numbers of children, therefore, encounter education for the first time as something that happens in a foreign language. This near monopoly exists *despite* nearly unanimous agreement among researchers and policy makers that mother tongue education is highly desirable. Indeed, a long series of resolutions and declarations over recent decades have gone further and acknowledged that, in primary education at least, it is vitally important for children to be educated in their mother tongues. 'Literacy in the mother tongue strengthens cultural identity and heritage' the *World Declaration on Education for All* stated confidently and without further elaboration over ten years ago (UNESCO 1990: 6). The declaration was adopted by delegates from 155 countries and about 150 organisations at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990. It had universal primary education and a massive reduction in illiteracy before the millennium as its objectives—a deadline that has both come and gone.

In 1996, a mid-decade follow-up meeting in Amman, Jordan, elaborated politely on this theme: 'While some research has been done on the impact of mother tongue and home support on learning achievement, the findings are not always brought to the

attention of policy-makers. Even when they are, they are not always acted upon' (UNESCO 1996: 22). Indeed, the same meeting concluded, 'the link between instruction in mother tongue and learning achievement has long been documented [but] the issue is not so simple.' This is mainly because the costs involved in producing learning and teaching materials in a multiplicity of languages are high, and many languages do not even have a developed orthography. Nevertheless, the meeting 'recommended mother tongue instruction where possible' while also calling for more research (UNESCO 1996: 23).

The Dakar 'Framework for Action' and its accompanying strategy document are both equally firm on the issue. The Framework, adopted by the World Education Forum in April 2000, argues that early childhood educational programmes should meet all the child's cognitive and psychosocial needs. In addition, such programmes 'should be provided in the child's mother tongue' (World Education Forum, 2000: 15). The use of the mother tongue as the language of instruction is emphasised elsewhere in the document (e.g. pages 26, 28), and the authors conclude unambiguously that 'literacy in the mother tongue strengthens cultural identity and heritage' (World Education Forum, 2000: 76). Even more recently, the April 2002 International EFA Strategy lists 'the introduction of mother tongue as the first school language' as an essential part of strategy 8, the creation of 'safe, healthy *inclusive* and equitably resourced educational environments' (World Education Forum, 2002: 37, emphasis added).

Other initiatives have taken a similar line. A draft resolution submitted by Mali to UNESCO in September 2001 argues for recognition of the OAU's decision to establish an African Languages Academy (UNESCO, 2001). The text speaks of 'the need to promote the African languages so as to ensure their use in all fields of development' and of 'the role of African language teaching in improving the quality of education' (UNESCO, 2001: 2). In 1999, UNESCO inaugurated an 'International Mother Language Day' to 'recall that languages are not only an essential part of humanity's cultural heritage, but the irreducible expression of human creativity and of its great diversity' (Foundation for Endangered Languages, 2002). The Asmara declaration of 17 January 2000 was adopted at a writers' conference. It states bluntly that 'African languages must take on the duty, the responsibility and the challenge of speaking for the continent' and concludes 'African languages are essential for the decolonisation of African

minds and for the African renaissance.’ The highly technical Bamako declaration of 26 May 2002 addressed the issue of African languages and the Internet, arguing *inter alia* for the pooling of efforts to code African languages for computerisation, to identify commonalities.

How does all this translate into action? While everybody is willing to subscribe to rhetorical platitudes, the core difficulty is that in education as in other fields, standardisation saves money. The countries which are most directly affected by the issue, namely African countries, are the least able to afford the costs involved in implementing multiple mother tongue primary education programmes, and to wait for the long-term and ill-defined benefits. Better, we may cynically conclude, in the short term to buy extra copies of the standard British or US texts, and to wait for the last speaker to die.

Publishing in African Languages

But language survival does not depend directly or only on the number of speakers. The two key factors, both of which must be present, are *will* and *transmission* (Warschauer, 2001). Speakers must have a powerful desire to keep their language alive, *and* must have the means to transmit it to the next generation. If, for example, a previously tightly knit and isolated community is integrated into a larger social context (e.g. the Flemish speakers of northern France) and the educational system in that context privileges a different language, then the transmission requirement cannot be met. This is the case all over Africa, and not just for minority languages. Intermarriage also plays a part. In my own family, for example, within three generations there has been a shift from Nyanja and Yao (the grandparents’ languages) to Nyanja and Swahili (our generation), and finally to English, Portuguese and even German (the grandchildren).

The weakness of African publishing industries plays a critical role in the decline of African languages as a written medium. Why do African publishers not produce more books, periodicals and newspapers in African languages? Part of the answer is that they produce very little original material *of any kind*. The book stock that is available in African cities comes largely from London, Lisbon and New York. African publish-

ers are, of course, highly conscious of this situation, and for sound commercial as well as patriotic reasons are continuously analysing their own weaknesses and looking for ways of increasing their market share (e.g., Horwitz Gray, 1997; Smith, 1996).

On the face of it, there should be a market for such materials, especially in such languages as Swahili, which are spoken by millions. In fact, there is a thriving Swahili publishing industry, producing mainly popular novellas in the context of what has been termed 'market literature' or 'suitcase publishing'. Manuscripts are sold for cash to traders, and the booklets are then printed up by jobbing printers and sold in markets and on street corners in large cities such as Dar es Salaam by the risk-assuming entrepreneurs. Whether this model can or should be reproduced elsewhere remains an open question.

If African language *print* publishing is difficult, what about the digital environment? As with most questions about the Internet and the Web, the answers are contradictory. Warschauer, for example, has argued that in certain circumstances the Internet allows minority language communities to perceive a possible future for their languages, and he adduces a case study of Hawaiian in support of this idea. The fact that there are thriving e-mail discussion lists in Swahili and in Zambian languages seems to support the argument.

A recent initiative in South Africa gives us more reason to hope. The 'translate.org' initiative is busy producing software which presents itself in the country's African languages—which is quite a different thing than simply using, say Microsoft Word to write a text in Xhosa or Zulu. The mission statement of Translate.org is worth quoting in full:

'South Africa has eleven official languages - an indication of cultural and language diversity of our nation. Yet most computer software is only available in one language (English) and is poorly supported in another language (Afrikaans), the other nine languages have no translation. The translation project of translate.org.za is addressing this by coordinating, initiating, sustaining and focusing the efforts of South African translation teams. This project aims to give learners, pensioners and all citizens of South Africa access to computers in their mother tongue. Firstly with tools for email and web browsing, then office productivity tools and lastly with a completely translated desktop.' (Translate.org: no date).

The project depends on the availability of open source software, much of which can run on either Windows or Linux platforms. To date a web browser in Xhosa, a complete office suite (word processor, spread sheet and data base) in Xhosa, Zulu and Venda, and the KDE graphical user interface for Linux in Xhosa, Zulu and Venda are all available.

New Thinking on BSSCs: Crisis or Opportunity?

The state borders that we have inherited from the colonial past cannot and do not do more than define spatial limits of the post-colonial state, which is everywhere in crisis and which has already collapsed in such countries as Sierra Leone, Liberia or Somalia. Until our African governments acknowledge that state borders do not *completely* define our cultural identities and that political nationality and speech community are distinct characteristics of both individuals and groups, we will be struggling with a hidden problem. This will require new thinking by politicians for whom nationalist legitimisation is seen as a key for survival. There are numerous examples of the *political* exploitation of what Mamdani (1996) has characterised as the distinction between citizen and subject.³ When the opposition in Zambia wanted to attack the government of Kenneth Kaunda in the early 1990s, they focussed on the supposedly 'Nyanja' or eastern character of the administration⁴ by claiming that Kaunda was 'really' a Malawian. In the end, his citizenship was revoked in March 1999 (*Daily Dispatch*, 1 April 1999).

But hidden problems do not just go away.

African speech communities have been marginalised by a combination of circumstances. These include the splitting of speech communities by superimposed state borders, the collapse of harmonisation initiatives in the face of politically driven linguistic nationalism, the use of exogenous languages such as English or French for education and the media, the debacle of language policy and planning. Above all,

³ Mamdani argues that colonialism left behind a divided power structure that mediates racial domination through tribally organized local authorities, reproducing *racial identity* in citizens and *ethnic identity* in subjects. This clearly has a bearing on the low status of BSSCs.

⁴ The House of Chiefs, for example, was chaired for thirteen years (1968-1981) by Chief Undi, Paramount Chief of the Chewa.

cultural realism has failed to moderate or modify dominant nation-building imperatives. What can we as Africans do about this marginalisation of language communities, often quite large ones, created by factors characteristic of the post-colonial period?

- ❑ appointees whose role would be to raise awareness among our citizens of the very existence of trans-border languages, with a perspective that looks at such language clusters *in their entirety* and not just from one side of a national border;
- ❑ better awareness among political and educational decision-makers of studies and conferences, like those in Namibia and Malawi, undertaken on this topic;

We must make the argument that what amounts to a widespread denial in practice of the critical importance of 'minority' languages actually increases problems of poverty and illiteracy.

Of course, the question will be asked, with the implicit answer embedded in its formulation, 'Will it not be too expensive to carry out the delicate political and technical work of negotiating the harmonisation of the NCM cluster between four or five countries?' The counter-argument is surely, can we afford to ignore the enormous potential of the economies of scale and *not* undertake this task?

There are some immediate steps that might be taken, building on the work done at the Okahandja and Mangochi conferences in 1996 and 2000 and their specific recommendations. Mechanisms need to be constructed that will address the problem of *political will*, as well as the more detailed technical and orthographic problems. I should like to see

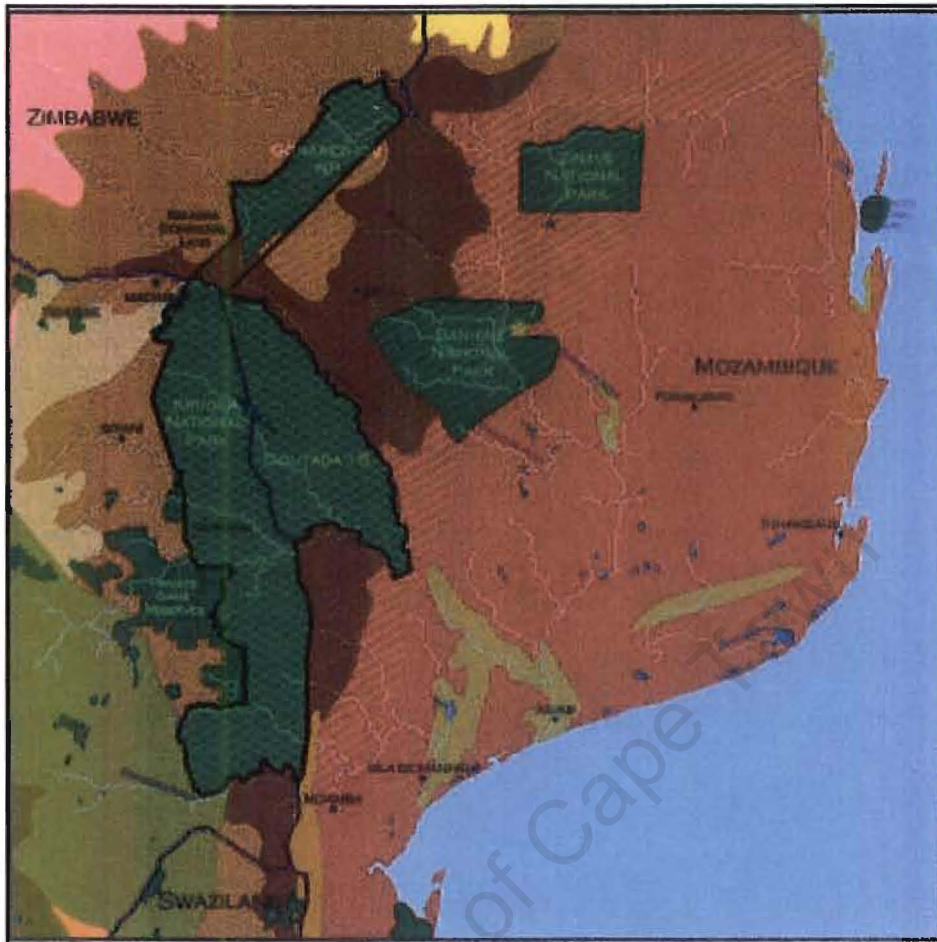
- ❑ a possible 'Permanent Commission' or bureau responsible for BSSC issues, primarily responsible for raising public and political consciousness about the fact that Setswana speakers can be South Africans, citizens of Botswana, Zimbabweans, or Namibians, for example.
- ❑ the second task of such a bureau would be to engineer a dramatic shift in political discourse by engineering recognition of the fact that BSSC issues—and

in fact language issues in general—are *human rights* issues. NCM-speakers have a right to cultural unity. We must work towards the collapse of the notion that state, ethnic and linguistic borders coalesce in any way in Africa. If even a few political leaders acknowledge language borders rather than just wishing them away, it would represent a huge advance for marginalised peoples.

- teachers, learners and parents, as well as publishers must be involved, through organisations such as PASA. PASA members should be encouraged to adopt new thinking, and to increase their awareness of sociolinguistic problems such as those discussed here. They must work for trans-border language publications, progressive language policy in countries where they are active, and work against the hermetically sealed national borders that split speech communities and limit commercial opportunity.

At the end of 2002, the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Park was opened with great fanfare by the heads of state of South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique (see colour map below). The 3.5 million-hectare park was known until October 2001 as the Gaza-Kruger-Gonarezhou Transfrontier Park, and brings together as a single unit three major game reserves that are separated by the state frontiers of the three countries involved. The good news is that cross-border co-operation between southern African countries is shown to be possible, at least rhetorically (there are serious problems still to be resolved, especially in the Zimbabwean segment: *Mail and Guardian* 16 December 2002). The bad news is that it is apparently easier to reach agreement about wildlife management across borders than it is about cultural matters such as BSSCs.

Map: Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Park



Source: Dept of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (2001)

Chapter 6

Conclusion: On Borders, Languages, and Political Courage

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the reasons why I chose to research this important but neglected topic, to synthesise my conclusions, and to offer some suggestions for future research and future action regarding these disregarded speech communities. The study has thrown up a wide range of concerns that suggest that there is a pressing need for an agenda for urgent language planning, both at status and corpus levels, all over Africa.

The Intellectual Journey

The intellectual journey that has resulted in this research dissertation has taken the form of a full circle. As a small child growing up in a southern Tanzanian village, I used my mother tongue, Nyanja, unthinkingly and naturally within the village community. Later, when I entered the Tanzanian educational system at primary level, I was compelled to adjust to Swahili as the language of instruction—not a huge change, admittedly, since the two languages are similar in structure and share some lexical items, but a shock nevertheless. In the early 1970s, I entered the Tanzanian secondary school system, and as I have described, encountered a second shock—the use of English as the language of instruction, with all its grammatical and orthographical idiosyncrasies. In 1979 I got married and moved to Mozambique, where I worked as a language teacher, working in Portuguese as a language of instruction to teach English to adult Mozambicans. In the late 1980s, I spent a year at the Classical University of Lisbon, studying Portuguese language and culture.

The irony of living and working in Mozambique for me was that I found Mozambicans speaking my language, Nyanja, and gradually came to realise that it was used far more extensively than just in a few villages around my family's place of origin. But I was still not intellectually prepared for a journey of discovery back to my roots. When

I came to South Africa in 1992, I studied Tourism Management at Cape Technikon, and became interested in heritage issues. In 1997, I conducted a research project on historical and heritage sites in Langa, Gugulethu and Khayelitsha, and later presented a paper on my findings—in Portuguese—at the VI Congresso Afro-Luso-Brasileiro at Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo. Like many other Africans, the result of all this linguistic chopping and changing was that I have ended up more comfortable and more competent, in many ways, in foreign languages than in my own mother tongue. I think, for example, in English or Portuguese much, much more than in Nyanja.

By this time, I was already enrolled as a student in this M.Ed. programme at the University of Cape Town, and had completed a commissioned research report on *The Role of the Portuguese Language in Southern Africa*, on behalf of the Centre for Language Studies for Southern Africa (CALSSA). As I worked on that report, I realised how little is academically known about African languages and their varieties, and that ironically here I was, working on a report about a former colonial language. Among the materials that I came across were PEBIMO primary school texts in Nyanja. I was astonished and evoked. I had not realised, *at an emotional level* that my own language could actually be written down for use in the classroom. And so a desire to know more about my own language community, and to share that knowledge, was born in me.

Political Borders and Their Impact

The condition of being a BSSC has *direct linguistic as well as social consequences*. Several of the case studies described in this dissertation, including the Karelian, Irish, and the Lamba-Bemba cluster examples, show that the existence of political borders running through the middle of a speech community in and of itself contributes to the development of differentiated varieties, as well as to cultural change. The Karelians, as their territory changed hands between the Finns and the Russians, experienced a series of ‘infections’: under the Russians, they experienced Russification; under the Swedes and the Finns, they gradually experienced the loss of their cultural and religious practices.

Irish is similarly dominated and defined in both its Gaelic and its English versions by its relationship with the far more dominant and socially powerful English. Irish itself,

despite its long history as a codified literary language, now survives mainly in the classroom, and not in the daily lives of Irish people. The Irish variety of English is a subordinate dialect.

Linguists now agree that Lamba and Bemba are dialects of a single language. The case is interesting because it clearly shows that ethnicity and language are not interchangeable categories. Both languages straddle the border between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia. There are thus four groups, the DRC Lamba and Bemba and the Zambian Lamba and Bemba, of whom only the Zambian Bemba have any language status at all, since Bemba is one of the seven African languages recognised by the government. In the DRC both Lamba and Bemba are minority languages. The Lamba and Bemba have different cultural practices, including dancing and music, and different traditional structures of chieftainship. Bemba is also one of the two main *lingua franca* of Zambia.

African Multilingualism as norm

As I have hinted in my description of my own intellectual journey, most educated Africans—and many less educated ones—are multilingual. They speak the language of their mothers, of their villages. When they go to school they are introduced to another language of instruction in the classroom, and if that is not a national African tongue, it will most often be one of the inherited colonial languages, Portuguese, French or English. Many Tanzanians are thus trilingual, speaking their *kilugha*¹, then Swahili learned in primary school and lastly English for those lucky enough to have gone to secondary school. Members of BSSCs will sometimes speak other neighbouring dominant languages that may confer some advantage within the host country. My father, for example, speaks Nyanja, and also the neighbouring and entirely Tanzanian Matengo, spoken by the people who reside in the foothills of the Livingstone Mountains.

Minority Languages and their Struggle to Survive

The threat to minority languages is not only the *influence* of majority languages over the years, but the possibility that the language will actually disappear as new genera-

tions of speakers adopt the more 'practical' and useful majority language. In this way, a speech community can be totally absorbed by the majority language group, with only a few signs of its previous existence in, for example, people's surnames, or place names. We have seen that this is likely to be the fate of the now tiny Flemish speech community in the Dunkirk hinterland of France, most of which has already been 'swallowed' by the French speech community.

Similarly, a literary tradition does not provide any guarantee that a language will survive or attain appropriate status. Languages such as Kongo, Karelian and Irish all illustrate this in different ways. Even though Kongo, for example, was already unified, codified, harmonised and established as a language of literary and printing by the twentieth century, not many young Congolese or Angolans today speak the language in any circumstances other than affective ones. The Irish language has a literary tradition going back centuries, and is supported by the Irish state, yet as far as young people—who mostly prefer to speak English—are concerned, it only flourishes in the classroom. The Karelian that is transmitted from parent to child nowadays is said to be impure and corrupt, and the younger generation of Karelians prefer to learn such majority languages as Swedish, Russian or Finnish, almost certainly dooming attempts to establish a belated literary tradition, and resulting in a decline in the number of speakers.

Language, Identity and Politics

Politics is of course a major factor in the construction of identity, whether by the individual or the social collective. As I have argued above, in the post-Arusha Declaration Tanzania of TANU and *ujamaa* after 1967, Nyanja speakers were persecuted mainly because of the actions of Oscar Kambona. Kambona was a minister, a party leader and was influential in regional politics and the OAU. He was also a Nyanja-speaker from the extreme south-west of the country. Kambona opposed Nyerere's adoption of a policy of socialism, and went into exile where he pursued various quixotic campaigns of opposition, including allying himself with the Portuguese against the Dar es Salaam government.

¹ A slightly disparaging term in Swahili, meaning 'little language' or home language. My *kilugha* would be Nyanja.

As a result, many Nyanja speakers were tarred with the same brush, and were jailed and investigated. To avoid this, they quietly changed their surnames, and began calling themselves *waNgoni*. The Nyanja began to disappear from the consciousness of Tanzanians as a language group or an ethnic group within the national borders, and to this day are often not listed or enumerated as such. This kind of voluntary disguising of ethnic origin also occurs in Zimbabwe, where people of Malawian origin sometimes hide their origins in an attempt to assimilate to the majority Shona or Ndebele peoples. Ronga speakers in southern Mozambique and in the Maputaland area of Kwazulu Natal similarly sometimes claim Zulu ethnicity. They are unwilling to own their 'real' identity for various reasons, among them a desire to assimilate, to avoid discrimination or xenophobia, and even to avoid the embarrassment caused by a widespread prejudice that their language is in some indefinable sense backward or underdeveloped.

Inherited political borders

In some circumstances, if relations between neighbours are good, borders are permeable and locals from either side can cross over and interact with each other in various ways. But this is not the case where there is conflict. Then state borders, invisible as they are, become real barriers for divided speech communities. Passports and visas, the exchanging of local and hard currencies, and even official language choice become important and divisive issues, and help to alienate people.

Concretely, my home village of Chimate is three villages away from the Mozambican border at Chiwindi. If I want to visit my father's clan in Kobwe, and to do it properly—which is to say legally—I will need a passport with a visa. To get a visa I will have to apply to the Mozambican High Commission in Dar es Salaam. I will need dollars or rands to change them into Mozambican currency, since the shilling is not convertible. When I cross the border, I will have to complete immigration forms in Portuguese. The point is obvious—my own language is devalued by these processes, and my sense of community with my relatives is diminished.

In terms of language policy, the pencilled lines that are national borders have blinded most African politicians. They are reluctant to acknowledge the reality that people from the same speech communities live on both sides of our borders. How much more convenient to see a small language group entirely within their own political frontiers, and to be able to argue that since there are only a few speakers, it will be prohibitively expensive to make the effort to develop these languages, these *vilugha*.

But if policy makers were to open their eyes and see the reality of such speech communities in their entirety, they would find that many BSSCs are large, and economics of scale are entirely possible. The NCM cluster almost certainly comprises more than ten million speakers (including *lingua franca* speakers). Yet in Tanzania, where there are only 30,000 or so Nyanja speakers, who are seen as politically unreliable into the bargain, the Government prefers to maintain the fiction that these people do not exist within Tanzanian borders.

Similarly, Somali is a major African language with about ten million mother tongue speakers, and another five million second language speakers in Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti. For Somali, the NCM cluster or any of the marginalised languages of Africa to develop, *political intervention is required*. Linguists can harmonise and standardise languages to their hearts' content, but if governments do not support the process, corpus planning is just an academic exercise that will do nothing to save endangered languages. In Banda's Malawi, dictatorial as it was, Chewa flourished because the president wanted the language to be established.

By contrast and in some senses, the modest PEBIMO project in Mozambique represents the diametric opposite of what happened—at least theoretically—in Malawi. The chosen languages are taught alongside Portuguese, and the project has a limited duration. Once the research was complete the project folded, *even though students who were taught in Nyanja or Shangaan performed better overall than students who were taught only in Portuguese*. An observer might be forgiven for thinking that this was truly another academic exercise. Texts were produced in Nyanja and in Shangaan, teachers were trained to teach in the selected schools and so forth. Yet because the Mozambican government did not buy into the project, it all led to nothing.

As we have seen, there are about six thousand languages in the world and African languages make up just under a third of these. But only two percent of these languages are used in education. Most African children, therefore, are subjected to a learning process that takes place through a foreign language. Since most meaningful learning occurs when early learners are taught in their first language, it is scarcely surprising that African education is in crisis. Despite the many ringing declarations on changing the language of instruction to MTE for the first years of formal education, African education is still dominated by European languages.

Language survival

There are two key factors if we wish to ensure language survival. Speakers must have the will to keep their language alive, and must have the means to transmit that language to their children. In pre-modern times, this was easily accomplished. Socialisation of the young took place within the family unit, the clan, the community, and at village level. Knowledge was recalled and transmitted from the old to the young via a common language—not just a system of verbs and nouns, but a shared view of the world and its meanings. Such learning activity might have been how to weave fishing baskets, to forge hoes, to make machetes, to fabricate hunting tools such as catapults, to use food preservation technologies, and so on.

All this changed with the introduction of Western formal schooling. Children now had to learn how to read, write and do arithmetic—all skills that were taught in dominant foreign languages. Socialisation was now the responsibility of an educational institution, and not of the parents or the larger community. The problem of language survival can be located at this precise nexus, because once children go to school and meet a new language that is the vehicle for the transmission of knowledge, there is no longer any continuity in their mother tongue learning. This marks the end of their education in their own language, and there is one less speaker to keep a language alive, let alone transmit it to another generation. Schools have become important agents for the transmission of knowledge, and play a vital role in the de facto choice of which languages will survive.

Languages that face this type of language death need to be identified and named. At the same time, clusters of mutually intelligible varieties should be harmonised and codified around agreed written standards, with appropriate written and published grammars and dictionaries. Finally, other and creative ways to preserve threatened languages need to be found. If we can find methods to preserve endangered animals and bio-diversity, linguistic diversity surely deserves its own kind of protected environment too. Languages represent the remains of ancient cultures. When a language dies, we lose much hard-won human wisdom. There is, for example, a well-known herb in East Africa known in Swahili as *mchaichai*, which is used to make a kind of tea. *Chai* is also the word for tea in Swahili. Were Swahili to disappear, perhaps the use of this restorative herb would also be forgotten.

Orthography and Codification

Different and inconsistent orthographies are characteristic of the few fully codified African languages. In some cases, because a political border divides the speech community, a language can be written in divergent orthographies. For instance, French-speaking missionaries using French phonetic values codified the Sotho language in what is now Lesotho. Meanwhile, a completely different set of principles was used to establish a Sotho orthography within South Africa. As we have seen, Nyanja in Mozambique employs an orthography influenced by Portuguese phonetics, but not in Zambia or Malawi. There is already some academic dialogue about ways to harmonise the three different orthographies in these countries.

The first attempt to codify Nyanja was published in the late nineteenth century (Rid-
del 1880). Over fifty years later, Watkins (1937) published his grammar of Chewa in the United States. The substitution of Chewa for Nyanja occurred at the instigation of Kamuzu Banda, Watkin's main informant. The most recent account of Nyanja dialects by a qualified linguist is the work done by Fortune (1959). There is some data on Nyanja in Zambia in the detailed Ford Foundation language survey of the 1970s (Ohannessian and Kashoki: 1978).

The existence of different orthographies is not cost effective, as publishers have to publish texts to serve different countries even though the language is the same. In

Somalia, a Latin-alphabet-based orthography was adopted in 1972. There was some pressure to choose Arabic, since most Somalis are Muslims and have some familiarity with Arabic from Quranic studies. Ethiopia and Kenya would obviously be thinking smart were they to adopt what the Somalis have already established, in case they decide to start teaching Somali in schools.

But most African languages do not even have a developed orthography, a fact which increases the probability that they will face extinction within the next hundred years. These uncoded African languages are in the majority. Their exclusion from the formal education system plays a major role in the process of linguistic extinction. The situation is aggravated because it is an accepted norm within so-called 'African literature' to employ a Western language. Many African voices are thus silenced, because of a complete lack of knowledge or through inadequate levels of competence in French, English or Portuguese. Many stories, many narratives, and many histories remain untold and are lost forever.

Codifying the BSSCs

It is probable that codified languages—if they have sufficient numbers of speakers—have a better chance of avoiding language death. For instance, codified Somali with its fifteen million or so speakers, is unlikely to vanish any time soon. Somali civil society and indeed Somali citizenship itself may be under threat due to the failure of the Somali state, but the language itself is not under threat. This is not the case with uncoded BSSCs.

The general state of confusion in the denomination of African languages increases the danger. Kunda, spoken in Zambia, is a completely intelligible variety of Nyanja. But Kunda is also the name given to a language spoken in Mozambique, which is a variety of Sena. Guthrie classifies Nsenga, spoken in Zambia, as a Nyanja variety, and NELIMO in Mozambique agrees. Other scholars do not. Dalby's '99-AUS-X' language class (Pimbi, Nyungwe, Sena, Banwe, Podzo and Hwesa) includes several varieties which *may* be closely related to Nyanja, but which are treated as separate languages by other scholars. Mpoto is sometimes confused with Nyanja. Mang'anja has sometimes been assigned as a variety of Sena, when in actual fact it is either an alter-

native name for Nyanja, or an intermediate variety between Nyanja and Sena, or even just a local pronunciation of the word A-Nyanja (meaning Nyanja-speaking people). When language surveys list varieties as languages and muddle up the names, we end up with an inflated statistic for the number of languages and an increased threat to the survival of those tongues.

There is an urgent need to train mother tongue linguistics scholars for all these languages to carry out properly detailed and objective language classifications. Such scholars can decide whether Kunda in Mozambique and Kunda in Zambia are actually related or not. If they are two different languages that simply happen to have the same name, steps can be taken to eliminate confusion.

The studies that have been carried out to ascertain what languages exist in Africa have severe limitations to their reliability. The relationship of a given variety to that spoken even in the next village or across the border remains largely unknown. The language classification data that we work with derives mainly from the large-scale language surveys of the continent or of individual countries (e.g. Zambia) and are based on an indiscriminate range of sources of widely varying quality. Much as one may applaud the industry of the compilers of these surveys, we now need far more coherent, clearer and above all more accurate classifications. We must eliminate the confusion in nomenclature.

Statistics for the populations that make up BSSCs are also scant, outdated, or non-existent, as we have seen in the discussion of the NCM cluster, especially in Tanzania. Census takers may never ask questions on language, for instance, and as a result the language statistics we work with are largely guesswork. We must rely on the SIL's statement that there are 'some speakers' of Nyanja in Tanzania, or on Spanish missionaries, who assert an unsourced and unsupported number of '35,000 speakers'. In Zambia the last numerical language survey is based on work done by students as long ago as 1977.

Publishing in African Languages

Little is published even in the better known African languages. Swahili is an exception to the norm. Swahili school texts, light fiction and newspapers are published mostly in Tanzania and Kenya. As for Nyanja, a few textbooks and some newspaper supplements are published, mainly in Malawi.

The weakness of African language publishing has a massive effect on the decline of African languages as a written medium. Publishing books requires the assumption of risk by entrepreneurs, and except for the so-called market literature or suitcase publishing enterprises, this is rare in most African countries. Few if any African languages are perceived by readers to have comparable status as English, French or Portuguese. Most people would rather read a novella in English or Portuguese than in Nyanja or Shangaan. Literate people were taught to read European languages and may not in fact be able to read their mother tongue easily or fluently, may not be accustomed to literary discourse, and may even not know very old or very new items of vocabulary.

African publishers produce very little in the way of original materials, and publishing designed to encourage readers in their own languages is insignificant. Publishers argue, often from ignorance or making large assumptions, that the potential market for African language materials is small and limited, especially in comparison with the market for publications in the European languages.

Most African languages are underdeveloped, uncodified, and vulnerable to arbitrary and politically-driven planning decisions. Rationally, planners should want to avoid reducing local languages to the status of mere regional languages, adding to the likelihood of a rapid demise—we need only look at the modern status of Occitan or Provençal in France or Galego (Galician) and Catalan in Spain.

Co-operation in pursuit of rational self-interest is needed at all levels. Politicians must work with civil society, and with academics (including linguists, historians, educators, and anthropologists), to ensure that the process of harmonisation and recognition is

fully supported. Civil society is the most important element here, since its members are the guardians, users, preservers and nurturers of their own languages.

It has to be understood from the beginning that *this is a process*. By their very nature, such processes tend to take time, as different role players take diverging positions and negotiate common positions. Time must be allowed for different views to be expressed and argued over until a common vision is found that is shared and owned by all the role players.

Language Rights as Human Rights

Language is part of the psyche and the personality of the individual. When language is alienated, a person feels alienated too. Somalis, Karelians and Nyanjas have all suffered for their language identity.

Somalis in Kenya lost the opportunity to learn their own language, while a few hundred kilometres away in Somalia it was being used as the language of instruction in schools. Karelians suffered from Russification, and in the end their language has become so diluted that fewer and fewer young people can speak it competently. Tanzanian Nyanjas suffered because a prominent politician who was also a Nyanja-speaker took a stand towards a particular policy. Under such circumstances, it is hard for individuals or groups to fight for their human rights including the right to use the mother tongue. All the consequences that follow have already been described. Literary production declines, and the pool of writers shrinks to a tiny elite. The middle classes have had the opportunity to learn European languages, which are seen as status languages. These are the languages that are taught, that have a guaranteed readership. The peoples' cultural and creative impulses are stunted as their languages are ignored and abused.

But African languages *can* be developed to serve the literary and academic domains, if only the political will is in place. Somali has successfully been used as the language of instruction at all educational levels since as long ago as 1978. Malawian academics have produced rich collections of papers dealing with aspects of the Nyanja language, its orthography, and ways of developing learning materials.

Recommendations

What, then, are the concrete steps that must be taken once we have recognised what should be the self-evident truth that African languages are *vitaly important* for African people?

First, African governments must seize the initiative and assign official status to African languages, validating them and the important role that they play in human development. Huge economic benefits can result from relaxing the artificial colonial borders and recognising border areas as *border areas*. Africans themselves must accept that historical accidents must be lived with, but that their negative side effects can be corrected through inter-regional co-operative bodies such as the SADC, ECOWAS, NEPAD, the AU, the PTA, and so on. If economic and military co-operation is possible, why not linguistic co-operation?

Second, regional co-operation in education must be taken seriously. Regional co-operation must also take place in teaching, and in the publishing and development of teaching materials. Texts could be written jointly, so that the daily realities, the cultural practices, the geographic features of the areas where shared languages are spoken can form an integral part of the worldview of new learning materials.

Third, education publishers need a new and daring vision. They must begin to talk, and not just to national education ministries. As multinationals, they must take an active facilitative role *across borders*—as only they can—to maximise the potential market African language book production and consumption.

Fourth, a serious study, with all the role players, needs to be undertaken to determine definitively *how many languages* are really spoken in Africa. Let us rid the continent once and for all of unscientific assertions about language, eliminate the duplication of language names, and base policy on real knowledge.

Fifth, resources must be found to train more linguists with mother tongue levels of competency, so that they can work on issues around the harmonisation and classification of African languages.

Last of all, we could start by holding a conference that would seriously address the issue of the relationship between corpus planning—about which we know something already—to status planning, which is seriously under-studied. Let us make harmonisation a priority.

By Way of Conclusion

It seems probable that if a serious survey were to be carried out to discover how many languages the peoples of Africa speak, it would show that there are nowhere near as many languages as we think. Languages cannot survive if they are only passed on by oral tradition. They are unsustainable. Languages die when they are not passed on from one generation to another.

To avoid language death, literacy is necessary, if not sufficient. To make languages sustainable they must be used in the education system. Our languages must be codified, and the younger generation must be taught to read and write their own languages. With such measures in place, the BSSCs may survive, and will preserve the wisdom that each linguistic tradition carries.

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